THE MOONS OF BALBANCA

BY M·E·M DAVIS

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THE MOONS OF BALBANCA

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HE THREW DOWN HANDFULS OF CONFETTI (p. 46)

THE MOONS OF BALBANCA

BY

M. E. M. DAVIS

ILLUSTRATED

BOSTON AND NEW YORK
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1908

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TO THE

DEAREST OF LITTLE PEOPLE

PAUL, MARY EVELYN

AND

EDWARD

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THE MOONS OF BALBANCA

I

THE PLACE OF TALKING

RICHARD ALLISON, eleven going on twelve, leaned over the banister and looked down into the thronged and lighted hall below. He had a mighty scowl on his small face. Neither the scowl, his tousled red hair, nor the ink-stains on his fingers, were in keeping with the gay panorama upon which he gazed, or with his own festive appearance. For Rick was not only clad in his Sunday best, but a rose adorned his buttonhole, and a silk handkerchief peeped coquettishly from his breast-pocket. He was in fact supposed to be a fractional part of the New Year's Eve reception which Madame Le Breton, his grandmother, was giving in honor of his pretty cousin, Mademoiselle Floris Le Breton; for Floris, making upon this afternoon her first formal bow to society, had insisted that the younger Le Bretons and Allisons should all be present.

"Hollo, Rick! What is the matter? Why aren't you down in the push?"

Rick turned, scowling more fiercely than ever, though the speaker was none other than Mr. Lawrence Vaughn, by courtesy Cousin Larry, whom he regarded as his own particular chum; and who came to see him nearly every day — when Floris was at home.

"Such a noise!" he said shortly. "It makes my head ache." And indeed, the sound of voices — mostly feminine — which floated up to them was like the rush of waves against a rocky shore. Mingled with it were the subdued tones of stringed instruments from the palm-screened nook where the musicians sat. "I call it silly," continued Rick, "a lot of people dressed up! In the daytime, too! Standin' aroun', talkin', talkin', talkin'."

"It *is* pretty noisy," admitted Mr. Vaughn.

"And I 'm sure Floris 'd rather be settin' on a bench in the courtyard with me — and you."

"Perhaps," murmured his listener doubtfully.

"Raoul, an' Zette, an' Basile, an' Odille are down there. They 're sneaks! They said in the Council Chamber this mornin' that wish-a-may-

die if any of 'em went. I s'pose they 're eatin' ice-cream this minute," he added bitterly. "But I don't care; I 'm not goin' down. You can tell Floris that I 'm not goin' down. *Floris!* I reckon she 's talkin', talkin', talkin', too!"

"Well, it 's her tea, you know —" began Mr. Vaughn.

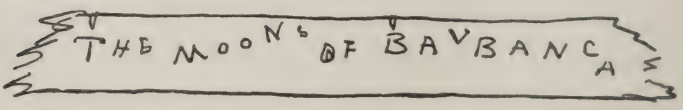
"Do you know, Cousin Larry," interrupted Rick, turning a pale, freckled, serious face toward his companion, "the Indians that lived about here in their wig-warms before New Orleans was foundered, called their town *Bal-ban-ca*. It means, in Indian, The Place of Talkin'."

"Really!" cried Mr. Vaughn. "That is interesting. It does seem to fit, does n't it!"

"You bet it just does," shouted Rick. He had to shout because, the reception being now at its height, the noise — the babble of French and English, the quickened music, the laughter, the swish of gowns, the stir of moving feet — had risen to a roar. "*Bal-ban-ca*, the Place of Talkin'! Say, wanter see some 'n'?" he wound up, shouting still, but with a hushing wag of the head. "You can't get nowhere near Floris anyhow."

He led the way down the hall, along an outer gallery which overlooked the courtyard, lying far below, dim in the gathering dusk; and into the large room, furnished barely with a table, a few chairs, and a battered desk or two, called by the family The Study, but known to the Le Breton and Allison children as the Council Chamber.

Mr. Vaughn followed, curious to see what new bee buzzed in the bonnet of his queer little crony — for Rick was undoubtedly queer, with his strange fancies and unexpected ways. The young man's eyes, as he crossed the threshold, were confronted by a large oblong piece of white cardboard set upon an old easel; a bottle of ink and a mucilage-brush were on the floor below. The cardboard, whose edges were jagged — they had in fact been cut by Rick himself with a table-knife — bore the legend in very black and very unsteady letters, —



"The Moons of Bal-ban-ca," read the little boy complacently, tracing the letters with his forefinger.

"The Moons of Balbanca," repeated Mr. Vaughan, trying to look as if he understood.

But Rick pinned his ignorance with shrewd bright eyes. "Of course you don't know about the moons," he said, with an air of condescension. "I did n't myself until Floris told me. The Natchez In-dians," he explained oracularly, "called what *we* call months, *moons*. They had the Moon of the Deer, when they hunted deer; an' the Moon of the Buffalo, when they hunted Buffalo; an' the Moon of Strawberries, an' — an' I forget the others. So 's I 'm goin' to call 'em moons too; I mean the months."

"Why," said Cousin Larry, "that is a fine idea!"

"At the first beginning of every month — moon, I mean," Rick proceeded, "I 'm goin' to put up a sign in the Council Chamber for us to go by. See? 'N I was makin' the first sign, Janerwary, you know; when I heard that talkin', talkin', talkin', down stairs, an' quicker 'n you could snap your fingers, I re-membered Bal-ban-ca. So 's I made this sign to hang up on top. See?"

"Then your moons will be the moons of

Balbanca. I see. Rick, you are a genius. I 'll have to come in and see how you work it." Cousin Larry had already backed out upon the gallery. Before Rick could say another word, he was gone.

The boy's jaws dropped before this shameless desertion; the glow faded out of him, leaving him chilled and forlorn. "I s'pose *he's* down there by now, in the middle of Balban-ca, talkin', talkin', talkin'! An' eatin' ice-cream."

All at once he saw his masterpiece through a mist of tears which made the letters more crooked than ever.

"They 've all forgot me," he sniffed under his breath a little later, gazing down once more into the Heart of the Place of Talking. He felt very ill-used, poor little chap, and very obstinate; and clinging to the banister with his inky hands he put his tousled head down upon the rail and began to cry. Presently he slid to his knees on the soft carpet, the kaleidoscope of figures in the great hall seemed to drop suddenly, lower and lower; it sank until it was but a gayly colored blur which moved dreamily to far-away music.

He was asleep. He dreamed that he was walking in an ancient wood where the trees were hung with fluffy pink and blue mosses, like the fluffy pink and blue frocks of Floris' "tea-girls;" and where knights and ladies rode, hawking and hunting, like those on the wall-paper in grandmamma's boudoir. He stood up to greet them as they advanced, when lo! they changed into a tumbled lot of black and white monsters who ran at him growling. They stretched out in a line as they charged upon him, like this: —

His terrified shriek rang out wildly above the music; he flew to the head of the stairs, rolled and bumped down the steps and lunged like a small catapult against a stately dowager, who staggered, and then glared.

"The m-m-oons! The m-m-oons!" blubbered Rick, prone on the floor.

"What a horrid dirty little boy," said the dowager, drawing her silken skirts away.

"I'm not!" declared Rick indignantly, restored to himself by the charge, and the smart

of his bruises. "I 've come to the Tea by inver-tation," he added with dignity; and began to blubber again.

At this point Mr. Vaughn appeared, looming like a sun out of the whirl; he picked the newly arrived guest up in his arms, pressing his dirty face against a white shirt front, and drawing the tousled red head to his shoulder.

Rick found himself, in no time, bowing before Miss Floris Le Breton, who looked like a young queen under her bower of roses. Floris patted the smeared face with her white-gloved hand and stooped to the comical little figure. "See, Rick, dear," she whispered, "I have It on. It 's the very nicest of all my *début* presents." Sure enough! pinned to the lace of her shining gown was Rick's silver (paper) heart with *My* on it,

in Rick's choicest letters. His heart jumped a little at this mark of favor; it jumped a great deal when he stood at the corner of a table in the dining-room with a (big) plate of ice-cream and a very fat slice of cake before him; the fluffy pink and blue tea girls fluttering about, and urging him to have some more — which he did, several times.

"Balbanca is not so very bad, after all, eh, Rick?" suggested Cousin Larry smiling.

"Not when you're in it," returned Rick solemnly.

II

THE MOON OF THE BEAN

THE next morning the above, copied — after Rick's original — by Raoul Le Breton upon a fresh oblong of cardboard, was hung on the wall of the Council Chamber; just above it shone forth the scroll whose motto had invaded Rick's dream. The Great Natchez Sun and his Warriors stood gaping upward, their necks craned, their eyes screwed critically at the two legends. Basile, the nimble-footed, had dared the very top of the step-ladder to drive the nails. The Great Sun — otherwise Rick himself — expounded the meaning of Balbanca.

"They 're bully, both of 'em," said Basile, descending. "*The Place of Talking*, that 's easy, *hein?* But what has beans got to do with January?"

Rick looked at him with such pitying scorn that the same question died unspoken on the three other pairs of lips.

They made regular "steps" in age and size, these grandchildren of Madame Le Breton, as they stood a-row in the old study where their fathers and mothers had studied and romped and concocted mischief when *they* were children; where Madame Le Breton herself had studied and romped — if stern and stately grand'-mère ever romped! — when *she* was a child. From eleven-year-old Rick Allison, whose red hair "came in" with his American father, to Odille Le Breton (twelve), dark like her creole forbears; thence, from the Allison twins, Basile and Louise (thirteen), the one blond, the other brunette, to Raoul Le Breton (fourteen), black-haired, tall, and wiry, the ascending scale was rhythmic and pleasing; the general effect of blue eyes, gray eyes, brown eyes; red hair, bronze hair, black hair; rosy cheeks, colorless magnolia-petal cheeks; chubby figures, slim figures, was chromatic. A healthy-minded set, hearty, merry, and noisy in two languages! For they were born, all of them, as it were, both to French and English.

"You 'll all know what beans has to do with Januwary in jew (due) time," said Rick gravely. And under his direction they joined

hands, and shrilled in chorus, dipping and bowing: —

Hail to thee, Moon of the Bean.

The house where the doubly orphaned Le Breton children lived, and where the Allison children were staying during the absence of their father and mother in Cuba, was the roomy old Le Breton mansion in the French Quarter of New Orleans. It stood upon Royal Street, that narrow noisy thoroughfare, once the principal boulevard of the old French town; it was three stories high, and had dormer windows set like bulging eyes in the peaked roof. A huge batten door with iron knocker opened from the *banquette* (sidewalk) into a wide flagged corridor through which one passed to the stair leading into the entrance hall above. Beyond lay the courtyard, a garden-close with paved walks, prim flower-beds, and here and there orange-trees and sweet-olives in green tubs. There were two mossy cisterns in one corner, half screened by bananas and calladiums, a sun-dial and a fountain; and there were some iron benches and some garden-chairs sacred to grand'mère and her friends who sometimes sat here of summer mornings. The Odd

Corner made by a projecting angle of the house was where the Council, the Camp, the Lodge, or whatever it might be at the moment, could sit (squeezed a little) when business required.

The rooms within the house were set with wonderful old furniture brought over from France in the days when Louisiana was a French Province; there were many curious cubbys and unexpected nooks about; and an attic filled with the left-overs of a century and more. Altogether, it was just such a place as the heart of a child desires!

In the Odd Corner one morning a few days after the Tea and the Hanging of the Signs, Rick Allison sat, or rather sprawled, on the sun-warmed flags. The Indian Book was too big for him to hold comfortably; so he had propped it up with a brick and, stretched flat on his stomach, was lost in the Wars of the Natchez. He did not hear a sudden rush of feet down the great stairway and along the corridor; but not being stone deaf, he looked up when an excited clamor of voices filled the court.

"Rick! Hello! Hi, Rick!"

"What's the matter?" demanded Rick as the others pressed pell-mell into the Odd Cor-

ner. He got up, but kept a downward eye upon the fascinating story of the Great Sun whose mantle had descended upon his own shoulders.

"The Moon of the Bean! The Moon of the Bean! We know, we know!"

"It 's all on account of Laure Bonnard's King-Cake Party," giggled Louise.

"It ain't!" declared Rick. But he turned very red.

"Anyhow, to-day is King-Cake Day, and there 's beans in King-Cakes. Is n't that it?"

Rick admitted that this was it.

"I knew it all the time," said Raoul, with a superior air.

"You did n't!" chorused the others in unison. "Why n't you say so, then?"

"*Venez, mes enfants.*" The soft old voice fell gently upon the half-laughing, half-angry tumult.

An old negress had appeared unnoticed upon the scene. She stood in the mouth of the corridor, a stately figure in black bombazine, with snow-white kerchief and high plaided turban. There were enormous hoops of gold in her ears; she carried a string of prayer-beads curiously carved. This was Maum Angélique, the

bonne, time out of mind almost, of the Le Breton household.

"Oh, is it time?" cried Louise, running forward. "Come on, Odille. It 's the Feast of the Epiphany at the Convent," she added, over her shoulder to the boys.

The two little girls, hand in hand, followed by the careful bonne, walked demurely down Royal Street, pausing now and again to gaze at the King-Cakes displayed in jutting windows, — big, little, and medium-sized cakes; sleek, brown, sugared, hollow-rings; tempting the passer-by with their crusty smell and the alluring mystery of the hidden beans.

"If I get the Bean to-night at Laure Bonnard's King-party," whispered Louise — familiarly known as Zette — in Odille's ear, "I'm goin' to give it to — now, if I tell you, 'Dille, you 'll tell!"

"I won't," declared Odille, on tiptoe with curiosity, "never, never, never! I won't tell."

"I 'm goin' to give it to Rozé Caire."

"Oh," wailed Odille, "you shan't! *I 'm* goin' to give it to Rozé."

"*You!*" sniffed Zette. "Rozé would n't *look* at you. You 're nothin' but a baby."

"I'm mos' as old as you," returned Odille indignantly.

A coolness fell between the rivals; they walked apart and in silence until they reached the arched entrance of the Convent in —— street. There the bustling importance of the occasion drove Rozé and the Bean clean out of their heads; they caught hands once more and sped down the long hall to the recitation-room, where the blue-ribboned Children of Mary were fluttering wildly around Teddy Magoon.

The Feast of the Epiphany, which commemorates the Coming of the Wise Men to Bethlehem to worship the Infant Christ, falls on the sixth day of January. It is observed annually in this particular convent in New Orleans by the Children of Mary, a chosen band composed of girls from the convent school. The Children of Mary, under the direction of the nuns, spread in the convent refectory a table of good-things-to-eat, to which are bidden and conveyed an old man and an old woman from the asylums of the Little Sisters of the Poor. These represent for the time being St. Joseph and the Virgin Mary; they are clad, on their arrival, in brand-new garments provided, and

mostly made, by the girls themselves. Besides these aged paupers, a small child is borrowed from some poor family in the neighborhood to represent the Infant Jesus; to be returned later in all the glory of fresh, dazzling-white petticoats and kilts.

This old-world pastoral, innocent of the least intentional irreverence, is a source of joyous anticipation and happy commotion in the school; the nuns themselves sharing in the excitement.

Zette and Odille could hardly stand still long enough to get their blue ribbons tied and knotted.

Old Peggy Stillwater, the St. Mary of the occasion, a little dazed by her own importance, passed, presently, down the hall leaning on the arm of Mother Vallier. She looked, thought her flustered hostesses, very proper in the black alpaca dress made by their own hands — with its snowy collar and cuffs; and they eyed complacently the gray knitted shawl about her shoulders — also their handiwork. As for M'sieu' Hypolite Gros, who followed meekly, — a shrunken little old man with weazened face and bald pate, — *le vieux* 'Polyte was resplendent in a brown-and-green plaid suit, high shirt-collar,

and flaming cravat, all donated by a generous shopkeeper "by" the French Market.

But Teddy Magoon! Never was such a curly-headed, chubby, clean, adorable Infant! He was about three years old, Irish by the name of him and by his eyes, laughing-blue under coal-black lashes, and by his pouting red lips. "Oh, *how* he is *be-u-tiful!*" sighed that Child of Mary who had been told off to dress him, while the others handed things and squealed with joy, "*but* of a *temper*, alas!" Teddy had indeed yelled lustily and squirmed angrily, scratching and biting, under his handmaid's ministrations; but he did look good enough to eat now. His bare legs above his low socks, his dimpled wrists, and his round face were scarlet from the unwonted scrubbing; his long lashes were hung with tears; but he had forgiven and kissed her who had evilly entreated him; he laughed, showing his jagged little teeth.

The Children of Mary filed into the refectory where the Reverend Mother with the nuns and the temporary St. Joseph and St. Mary awaited them. They were preceded by two of their own number bearing their own blue silk embroidered banner; they marched singing;

and in their midst, stooping now and again, finger in mouth, to admire his own shiny black pumps, walked Teddy Magoon.

Teddy set up a shout at sight of the loaded table, and he gurgled noisily and rapturously all through the formal little speeches which preceded the feast, thereby causing Laure Bonnard to forget half her lines, and Malie Sullivan to retire weeping into the hall, with all of hers unsaid.

"'*Tit ange* — little angel!" murmured the Children of Mary consolingly. They meant Teddy, not poor Malie!

And now they bustled about serving the two old people, who were humbly and apologetically hungry; Madame Mère looked on from her chair of state, kindly and benignant. Teddy Magoon, perched upon the convent Dictionary, beat the table with impatient fists, kicked out his fat legs, roaring and reaching for everything in sight, and cramming his mouth with goodies until his eyes were ready to pop out of their sockets.

It was with difficulty that the Infant could be persuaded after the feast to go into the Convent Chapel for the Benediction. Twice he

broke loose from his captors and ran bawling into the court; and when at last he was lifted to his place, between the St. Joseph and the St. Mary, he wriggled down and disappeared into the sacristy, and had to be hauled from under a table by the ankles. "Oh, *how* he is angelic!" chorused the Children of Mary trooping after him.

But at length the Benediction was over; the Children, flushed and happy, were dismissed; Peggy and 'Polyte were returned to their respective asylums. Teddy Magoon was placed by Madame St. Martin herself in the care of Louise Allison, with minute instructions as to his safe conduct and his safe delivery into the hands of his mother, Mrs. Bridget Magoon, washerwoman, around the fourth corner, third house on the left, second story, back gallery room.

With an impressive grown-up air Louisette directed the bonne to proceed homeward with Odille. She took the chubby hand of the (late) Infant in her own and started, much elated over the importance of her charge. Teddy, sleepy-eyed and fretful, and perhaps stomachachy after his unusual dissipation, lagged heav-

ily. Zette coaxed pleasantly enough for a bit; then (she afterward remembered with shame) she jerked the whimpering little creature along impatiently, even angrily. The Little Angel remonstrated sharply after his own fashion; then he screeched at the top of his lungs. Finally, he stopped short and plumped himself down on the dirty banquette, where he sat silent but determined. Zette, exasperated, coaxed again, implored, threatened. In vain. Immovable as a small boulder the Heir of the House of Magoon sat looking at her with half-veiled eyes, dabbling his slippered feet in the open gutter.

"Very well. *Stay* there!" cried Louise at length, resisting an itching desire to slap the obstinate upturned little face. How glad she was later that, at least, she had not done this!

She walked to the corner, watching Teddy from the tail of her eye. Just around the corner there was a baker's shop, and in the window of the baker's shop, King-Cakes, King-Cakes, King-Cakes!

"I 'm going to wear my new white dotted Swiss," mused Zette, off on the instant to the Land o' Dreams, "and my new pink sash — if

Mère will let me. And I've heard that if you can say the A, B, C backward, you're sure to get the Bean. *I can.* I'll give it to Rozé. Rozé is such a pretty boy! Rozé will be my King. I think, maybe . . . yes . . . I think Rozé 'll squeeze my hand!"

A bashful smile overspread her pretty face; she half closed her eyes, filled with a blissful inner vision of herself in a white dress and pink sash, with Rozé Caire squeezing her hand, at Laure Bonnard's King-Cake Party.

Somebody jostled her; it was a boy who came out of the baker's shop with a huge cake hung over his arm like a hoop. She looked up quickly, remembering; then she ran around the corner after Teddy Magoon.

But there was no Teddy! Neither on the sloppy banquette where she had left him nor down the street. Neither had he been seen or heard of at the Convent, whither she returned breathless to inquire of the portress.

"*Teddy!* Teddy, *dear*, where *are* you?" she called, retracing her steps in a panic. She paused to ask distracted questions of women sitting in door-ways, of boys playing in gutters, of men driving wagons. No one had seen a little boy

in white kilts, with patent-leather pumps and a new white broad-brimmed hat.

Despairingly and falteringly, at length, Zette sought the tenement house around the fourth corner, where the widow Bridget Magoon lived, and took in washing; she found that lady in the cluttered-up courtyard, singing loudly and cheerily over her wash-tubs.

"Mrs. Magoon, I — I presume?" ventured Zette, approaching timidly.

"Magoon is me name; the Widdy Magoon," replied Teddy's mother. "Is it foine washin' yer mother 'd be wantin', the day, Miss?"

"Oh, no," said Zette. "Is — is little Teddy Magoon here?"

"Teddy 's at the Convent, the day," began Mrs. Magoon proudly, speaking very loud for the benefit of envious neighbors.

"Oh, Mrs. Magoon," interrupted Zette, all of a tremble, "I — I 've just come from the Convent myself, where Teddy — where Teddy — I 'm a Child of Mary, Mrs. Magoon. He looked like an angel, Mrs. Magoon; and he had a perfectly lovely time. Yes, Mrs. Magoon, I started to bring him home — oh, wait a minute, Mrs. Magoon! please, and I — I — I —"

Mrs. Magoon had straightened her bent back, and stood glaring down at the speaker; she wiped the soapsuds first from one powerful arm and then from the other. Without speaking, she set a hand on either hip and leaned over the terrified transgressor like an Avenging Angel. "And phwat," she demanded at length in an awful voice, "*phwat have ye done wi' The Magoon?*"

III

THE MOON OF THE BEAN (*continued*)

It will be a long time before Louise Allison forgets the horror of the hour which followed her first interview with the mother of The Magoon! In the grasp of that formidable person she tore frantically up street and down, adding ceaselessly the thin treble of her "Teddy, *dear*, where *are* you?" to the hoarse boom of the widow Magoon's "Teddy, me bye, sphake to yer mither! Teddy, me lamb, have they been afther murtherin' ye?" A tail of ragged gamins, boys and girls, and a regiment of dogs ran at their heels, whooping and yelping down alleyways, diving into courtyards, plunging into shops, banging through family living-rooms. Among the whoopers, Zette caught before long a glimpse of Raoul Le Breton, and her twin, Basile, diving and plunging and banging with the bravest.

Mrs. Magoon's boom had sunk gradually to a choked wail; she was calling in one and the

same breath upon the saints to reshtore to her arrums her shwate Terrence; and to send down desthruction upon thim as had lost him. Zette shut her eyes tight as she panted along, expecting every moment to be blasted by a breath from heaven. Suddenly Mrs. Magoon stopped; so suddenly that Zette lunged forward on her knees; she felt the hand that clutched her own open and shut; the bulky form against which she leaned grew rigid. "Ye blatherin' gutter-shnipe!" cried the Widow Magoon. "Look at the frock av ye, an' the shoes av ye, ye nagur! Thrue, but I 'll baste the skin av ye whin I get ye home, or me name 's not Bridget O'Callan Magoon!"

Zette had opened her eyes just in time to see The Magoon emerge from a slit-like alley quite near where she herself had left him. He had been crying, the poor little Infant! his cheeks were smeared with tears and grime; his legs, but now so shining clean, were streaked with the muddy water which trickled from his soggy skirts; his patent-leather pumps were shapeless; the brand-new hat which he dragged after him by its once snow-white ribbon was a soaked mass of felt and mud. His forlorn

face cleared at the sight of his mother; he ran to her, reaching out his arms.

Mrs. Magoon threw him to her shoulder. "Don't ye grin at *me*, ye blaggard," she snapped. "Thrue, but its meself will shmack ye whin I get ye home!"

"Oh, Mrs. Magoon," pleaded Zette all in tears, "*don't* hurt him! It was n't his fault —"

"Who-oo-o!" snorted Mrs. Magoon. "Is it for the loikes av a shlip av a gurrl loike yez to be tachin' the Widdy Magoon phwat to do wid her own rapscallion!"

Zette shrank back terrified. But Teddy bestowed a seraphic smile upon her over his mother's fat shoulder; he even winked — as much as to say, "Be aisy, me jool. The Magoon can manage *Her!*"

Zette walked wearily homeward, escorted by Raoul and Basile, who pictured to her in glowing terms the dismay of the Royal Street household when Maum Angélique came back from the convent without her. Madame Le Breton had chanced to be out at the moment. "But she 'll give it to you hot when she catches you," consoled the boys. Zette heard without heeding what they said. She was tired and

miserable; the Reverend Mother, she reflected dolefully, would never trust her again, never! She would be reprimanded to-morrow before the whole school; she would lose her good-conduct ribbon; perhaps she would be expelled from the Children of Mary! She ought to be, she admitted. Teddy Magoon, in his soaked clothes and ruined hat, swam before her tear-dimmed eyes. All at once a sharper misery took her by the throat: *she would not be allowed to go to Laure Bonnard's King-Cake Party;* she would not share in the cutting of Laure's King-Cake; somebody else would give the Bean to Rozé Caire — Odille, maybe! At the thought, the tears standing in her eyes welled over and rolled unheeded down her cheeks. Raoul, abashed and helpless, dropped behind and gazed scowling into the window of the Twin Sisters' shop; but Basile snuggled to her shoulder. "Don't cry, Zette," he whispered, "your dress ain't so *very* tore." As if *that* were what she was crying about!

She trembled so that she could hardly stand when she came into the presence of Madame Le Breton, sitting in her great armchair in the salon, — "like a judge," thought the culprit,

stealing a look at the stern pale old face with its crown of snow-white hair. But she told her story straight through without flinching, and without attempting to excuse herself; only breaking down when she came to Teddy, plastered, as it were, in his wet clothes to the Widow Magoon's cruel breast. "He was so sw-w-weet," she sobbed, "and I had been so w-w-*wicked* to him! Oh, I 'm so sorr-y," she ended with a wail, "and the Reverend M-m-mother will never for-g-g-give me!"

Madame Le Breton had listened in a silence which seemed ominous. "You were very, very careless," she now said; "Madame St. Martin will be quite right to make you do penance for your bad conduct. For the present, however, I think you have been sufficiently punished." She drew the little girl to her and kissed her tear-wet cheek. "Run along, now, and get your dinner, or Angélique will not have time to dress you for the party."

Zette's eyes widened; she pressed her hand tightly to her thumping heart; she felt as if she might faint. "The *p-p-party!*" she stammered. "Oh, Mère, you are going to *let* me go to the *party!* Oh, if you only knew!"

"I do know," said grandmamma, one of her rare smiles breaking over her quiet face. "*I* have been a careless, and wicked, and repentant little girl, myself."

"Oh," breathed Zette in an awed whisper. She bounded away, all the weariness gone out of her feet. "How *dear* she is!" she sparkled aloud. "But of course some'n' will *have* to be done to me. I'll have to wear my old blue — and *no sash!* But, anyhow, I'm *goin'*."

But it was the white dotted Swiss after all which Angélique a little later slipped over her head; and Floris tied the pink sash in a double bow about her waist.

The Bonnards lived down Royal Street in an old French mansion as like to that of the Le Bretons as one pea in a pod is to another, except that a smaller door was cut in the street door, looking for all the world like the opening into an immense mouse-trap. The courtyard and the overlooking balconies, when the Allison-Le Breton bevy arrived in care of Maum Angélique, were hung with colored lanterns, and there were little balls of light hanging like golden fruit from the orange and crèpe myrtle trees.

"Oh!" cried Rick, "I wisht I had called it the Moon of Lanterns! I will, next year."

A great many boys and girls were already assembled in the lighted salons above; there was a frieze of grand'mères and uncles and aunts, and marraines and grand-pères, sitting, after the pleasant Creole fashion, against the wall, exchanging reminiscences and looking on at the games. For there were games at first, and dancing; but it was still early when the Twelfth-Night or King Cake was brought in on a silver salver and placed upon a table with a silver knife like a butcher's cleaver beside it. It was an incredibly large crusty-brown sugared ring, and smelled heavenly.

The boys nearly all hung back, painfully red and sullen, when the time for the cutting was announced, by Papa Bonnard himself; they affected not to hear their names called, and had to be shoved forward; several hid behind curtains or under tables, and only came out at supper-time; one very young gentleman cried and had to be taken home by his nurse. The sole exceptions were Rozé Caire, rather cocky and conceited in his new Tuxedo, shiny pumps, and white tie; Raoul Le Breton, who was stiffly

stoical; and Rick Allison, who clove the cake with the fierce air of a Great Sun tomahawking his bloody foe, Red Shoe, of the Cherokees.

The girls, though squirming, and twisting their handkerchiefs and ribbons, marched up to the cake with heads held high, and tripped away crumbling their (beanless) slices with nervous fingers. They generally declared in a loud whisper that they "did n't want the old Bean, anyhow."

Zette awaited her turn in a radiant flutter. "S'pose you was at home gettin' punished!" giggled Odille.

"I ought to be — this minute," admitted Zette, sobered at once. "I know I ought n't to be having such a good time," she added to herself.

"Mademoiselle Louisette Allison," called Papa Bonnard, in his big cheery voice. Mademoiselle Allison stepped forward mechanically; mechanically she pressed the knife into the crusty ring — of which only a small section remained — and a second later, lo and behold! she held the all-coveted Bean between her thumb and forefinger.

SHE PRESSED THE KNIFE INTO THE CRUSTY RING

Everybody came crowding around her.

"Zette Allison has the Bean!"

"How she is lucky, Zette!"

"Who 'll you give it to?"

"Hurry! Hurry!"

"Of course it 'll be Rozé."

Louisette's eyes traveled slowly around the circle; they were very dark eyes, and they were made darker yet by some emotion — anxiety or distress or sacrifice — behind them; they rested for one moment upon Rozé Caire, whose lips were parted in an expectant smile. Then Zette "snapped her eyelids to," as Basile said afterward, and walked blindly forward and past Rozé! "It 's an *awful* penance," she breathed within her soul, "but *I'll do it!*"

She stood still, snapping her eyes open once more, and held out the Bean — to the Strange Boy.

She did not know the Strange Boy. Nobody did. He had been fetched by a man-servant as far as the outer hall of the Bonnard house; there he had stayed mostly, unspeaking and unspoken-to, now peering into the salon, now shrinking back, unseen by his older hosts, merely glanced at carelessly by the unthinking

younger ones. He had been overlooked, unintentionally, at the Cutting of the Cake, but had mustered courage enough to step into the circle at the final shrill "Hurrah, Zette's got the Bean."

He was, thought Zette, looking at him from afar and examining him anear, the very ugliest boy anybody had ever seen. He was tall and lanky, with a much freckled thin face and a shock of tawny hair that tumbled, uncut, over his shoulders. He had on a jacket which seemed to have shrunken; his long wrists stuck out of the sleeves; the tails hunched up, showing his waistband; his breeches hardly covered his knees; his shoes were clumsy; his white skin was painfully visible through a hole in his black hose.

Zette fairly hated him when she saw the Bean lying in his outstretched palm.

"Thank you, Miss," the Strange Boy said, fiery red under the wondering glances of fifty pairs of eyes. His voice was unexpectedly pleasant; his face, now that he smiled, had an open and engaging frankness. "But," he went on, "I don't know what it is all about, don't you know."

"Why," stammered Zette, feeling Rozé's reproachful eyes upon her, "it means that I 've chose you for my King. I — I 'm your Queen, an' — "

"An'," shrilled a little girl at her elbow, "you 've got to give her a back-party in ten days an' ask us all."

"She means a return-party," explained Zette blushing, "but of course you don't have to."

"But I want to!" cried the Strange Boy eagerly, "and I will."

The King and Queen sat, silent, side by side on a high sofa, while their subjects filed, to music, in couples before them, bowing to the very floor.

"Can you dance?" asked Zette of her King, when they stood up; for the music had changed into a two-step.

"Oh, I reckon I can bump around," he grinned, putting his arm about her waist.

Bump around! That Strange Boy in his funny clothes could out-dance any boy there, Creole or American. The ease and grace of his long stride, his light step in his clumsy shoes, the assured way in which he threaded the whirling couples without touching a shoul-

der or tangling a ribbon, was nothing less than astonishing.

"Freckle-Face can have his pick of partners," said Rozé gloomily to another boy. "I reckon Zette Allison thinks she's found a gol'-mine. Well, she can *have* him."

It *was* a little hard on Rozé! And he had to stand by and see that Strange Boy do other quite wonderful things, — make shadow-pictures on the wall with his long slim hands, and turn handkerchiefs into wolves and rabbits to amuse that half of the guests who had to wait while the first half had supper. Besides, it appeared, the Strange Boy spoke Spanish, as well as French and English.

"What is your name?" asked Madame Bonnard when he came up to make his parting, and party, speech.

"Don Carlos Peyton, ma'am."

"Ah!" said Madame Bonnard, interested, "then your mother is Carmen Morales!"

"My mother is dead. She was Carmen Morales before she was married." His thin face clouded.

"He is a Morales; Carmen's son." The word went around the circle of grandmam-

mas and aunts and cousins; they all beamed upon the Strange Boy. It was as if they had said: "He is of the blood-royal."

He walked home with the Allison-Le Bretons, the manservant hovering in the rear. "I've come down from Tensas Parish to go to school," he explained to them all. "My Black-Mammy fixed me up. I reckon she don't know much about clothes," he laughed a little ruefully, "nor my father, neither. But he's as good as gold, my father is; and my Black-Mammy is just about the best there is. Do you know," he went on, turning to Zette, "I was just about to sneak off home when you gave me that Bean. Fact! Or cry. Or somethin'. I thought it was the stupidest, lonesomest old party I'd ever run across. An' those girls an' boys the meanest ever. But *now!* Why, I've had the time of my life!"

"So have I," cried Zette.

"And they are — *bricks*, all of 'em!" he added, looking almost handsome in the moonlight.

When he had been invited by Raoul at parting to come and see him "any old time," and the street-door had shut him out, and the

party-goers were following Maum wearily down the corridor, Zette said in a half-whisper to her twin:—

"Is n't it curious, Basile? I 'm 'most ashamed to be so happy. I certainly was yaller-dog mean to Teddy Magoon, an' I have n't been punished at all. An' I *tried* to punish *myself;* but it turned out a blessing in disguise — I mean Don Carlos did."

"Well," remarked Basile sleepily, "there 's to-morrow; an' the Reverend Mother. Gee, Zette, I would n't like to be you *to-morrow!*"

IV

THE MOON OF THE TAW

The February mid-afternoon was soft and warm; the sky was of a blueness not to be described. In the ample gardens of the American Quarter and in the little secluded courts of the French Quarter, the roses, unmindful of the calendar, were all in bloom. The streets, a-flutter with gayly colored flags and pennons and banderolles, were alive with people: men, women, and children, laughing, shouting, shoving with good-natured elbows. For the Carnival was at its height; maskers in grotesque or picturesque costumes wound their way in and out through the moving crowds — gypsies with tambourines, long-tailed monkeys (who spoke behind their masks with the familiar voices of Tom, or George, or Jules), waddling black mammies in monstrous turbans, minstrels, feathered Indians, hobby-horses with clowns astride — it was like a great, fantastic dream!

There was a soberer note about the stir and bustle in front of the French Opera-House in Bourbon Street. Here workmen were busy laying a white cloth along the double entrance stairway, and setting palms and ferns in enormous pots along the balustrade of the gallery above. They were arranging the scene, as it were, for one of the Carnival Mystic Balls, which was to follow, the same night, the Street Pageant.

In one corner of the Opera-House arcade a group of boys were playing marbles. The ring was laid in a clear space; the players, friend and foe, squatting around it or standing bent with hands on knees, guarded it with eager, wary eyes, their sharp ejaculations — cabalistic, mysterious, known to the elect only — rose into the general hubbub.

"Vent yer kicks!" "Knucks!" "You're fat!" "Don't ye dast to fudge!" "Why n't you take a roundance?"

Raoul Le Breton had just squared himself for his turn; his thumb behind his agate taw was cocked like a trigger ready to go off. A woolly (brown flannel) baboon came hopping on all fours across the street, carrying its tail

under its forearm; it stood on its hind legs and playfully joggled Raoul's elbow, scratching his shoulder with a dusty paw. The taw leaped unbidden from Raoul's thumb into the air, dropped, and spun singing along the Toulouse Street banquette. As if with malicious purpose, it rolled under the foot of a man who came hurrying along from the side, or stage, entrance to the Opera-House. The man, who was fat and not over young, tripped, threw up his arms, and fell sprawling; his hat, cane, and eyeglasses flew wildly about. But in a twinkling he was on his feet, and turning a thunderous face upon the unlucky owner of the agate.

"You — you young scoundrel!" he sputtered, "how dare you — !"

"I beg your pardon, sir," cried Raoul on his knees, picking up his victim's scattered property; "I 'm sorry, I 'm sure. I hope you 're not hurt. Let me brush you off, sir." He whipped out his handkerchief and dusted the irate gentleman vigorously.

"Ha, never mind, my boy," said the gentleman, his rage suddenly cooling; "I 've played marbles in my time. Right here — many a day. Let me see your chinas. What is your

name?" He rattled along as if he might be thinking of something else.

"Raoul Le Breton, sir."

"Ha! Any kin to Miss Floris Le — to Madame Jean Le Breton of Royal Street?"

"Madame Le Breton is my grandmother, and Floris is —"

"Yes. Yes. To be sure. Ha! Wait a moment." He eyed the boy critically from head to foot. "He's about the size," he muttered. "They'll fit him, I guess. Besides — I didn't know there was a brother. Else —" He bent to Raoul's ear and whispered a question.

"Oh—h!" cried Raoul enraptured. "*Oh!* you *bet* I would. I—I mean, thank you, sir. Will you really *let* me! But maybe my grandmother wouldn't —"

The gentleman penciled a few lines on a page of his note-book and tore out the leaf. "Give this to Madame Le Breton," he said, handing the note to the excited boy. He whispered further and more minute directions. "Remember," he said aloud as he turned away, "five, sharp."

"Five sharp," echoed Raoul; he picked up his half-forgotten taw, and raced home as fast

as his legs would carry him, heedless of the reproachful shouts of his fellow players.

At a quarter to five the same afternoon he stood on a certain corner — waiting. His heart was beating very fast, and as the moments drifted on and the crowds moving Canal-Streetwards thickened, his gray eyes became feverishly expectant. Nevertheless he started violently when a jolly-looking lad some four or five years older than himself addressed him with a merry twinkle dancing in his eyes. "What o'clock is it, my friend?"

"Five, sharp," returned Raoul, solemnly. He was a little disappointed. He had not thought the messenger would be a Genie — exactly; but — well, at least a powerful Black Slave! They always were in such Arabian Nights stories as this.

But when he followed his merry-eyed conductor across the large walled "yard," where the Mystic Parade was already getting into line, he could have had his pick of Slaves or Genies! The great "floats" (wagons), gilded and decorated, stood in glittering procession, the harnessed mules covered with housings; the men standing at their heads were shrouded

in dominoes. Upon the floats, builded of *papier mâché*, were marvelous sea-palaces, coral grottoes, diamond and pearl caves — all overhung with seaweed and ocean flowers, and strewn with gigantic seashells; and guarded by winged creatures and by tall Nubians who might well have stepped out of an Arabian Night.

In the rooms opening upon the yard there moved a strange medley of sea-monsters, green-haired mermen, mermaids with shiny tails, sea-fairies in gauzy draperies, water-babies with bright wings, crabs with mighty claws, lobsters, shrimp, jelly-fish, angel-fish, crocodiles. Familiar as he was with Carnival parades, from the outside, Raoul was fascinated and terrified by his sudden plunge into the heart of one. For this is what the rolling of his agate Taw had led to.

When a Neptune, in passing, poked him under the ribs with a gilded trident, he almost shrieked; but when from behind Neptune's mask there came rumbling the words, "Vent yer kicks," he was reassured. "It 's the fat gentleman," he chuckled. A mermaid squeaked in his ear, "*The Moon of the Taw*." She lifted her mask, and behold! she was Cousin Larry.[1]

[1] Only men take part in these famous parades.

Raoul was himself assisted, by one of the dressers, into a page's suit of blue and silver. He would have preferred to be a lobster, or an alligator, or — but he had no time to decide which; he was swept along with the others into the yard, all moving like trained soldiers under the command of the Captain of the Crew. His excitement rose to fever heat when he found himself boosted up a ladder and directed to his place on the Car of His Majesty, the King of a Night. There were five other pages, all dressed like himself in blue and silver, with chubby masks, yellow curly wigs, rossetted slippers, and silken hose.

The Procession rolled majestically forth.

It was all so like a dream that the Substitute Page (for so he had heard himself called) had to pinch himself to make sure he was awake. The gorgeous cars swung and swayed along, slowly, to the music of many brass bands. The King, sitting high on his golden throne, bowed and waved his sceptre to the myriads of cheering subjects who thronged sidewalks and galleries.

The well-known streets seen from his perch on the car had become strange and unreal to Raoul's eyes; the upturned faces were like a

never-ending white sea. But as the pageant moved on, his heart steadied, his eyes cleared; he picked out his schoolfellows in the sea and shouted out their names, hugging himself with delight over their amazement. He threw down from the well-filled box at his feet handfuls of confetti, laughing at the upthrown hands waving like newly grown flowers in the air.

When the car stopped before one of the illuminated clubhouses in Canal Street, that the King might greet his chosen Queen sitting on the gallery, surrounded by her court, Raoul the Page did not even look up; he had caught sight of Maum Angélique with Zette and the others in the crowd below. He almost tumbled off the float in his haste to toss down some strings of beads and bits of tinsel from the wings of the overgrown butterfly above his head.

"And to think they don't know!" he exulted. "And I never can tell 'em. I 've promised."

"Well, I reckon it 's all over," he sighed, when the cars stopped before the stage entrance of the French Opera-House, and the maskers all descended.

Not at all! It had just begun.

For presently the heavy curtains behind which the maskers waited rolled slowly up. And there was the Ball! Raoul had never seen a ball before; he hardly saw this, he was so confused and so frightened. He stood with his brother pages on the steps of the canopied throne where the King sat, while the gay procession of gods and goddesses, mermen, mermaids, lobsters, jelly-fish, sea-urchins, what not! marched and frisked around the immense stage. The house in front, tier upon tier, looked like another — mounting — sea of faces, only the faces, he thought, were all young and all beautiful.

Then came a great clapping of hands, and shouts that sounded like thunder from behind the masks. And there was the Queen in her white robe and trailing mantle and glittering crown, and — well, it really was past belief, and Raoul had to pinch himself again, *for the Queen was his sister Floris!* She looked pale, and she trembled when the King, meeting her, took her hand and led her to a seat beside him on the throne; but the color flashed back into her cheeks, and she was very beautiful, was

Floris. Raoul knew that everybody thought so, by the way they kept on clapping and shouting. And Floris bowed like a real Queen. Raoul's heart seemed ready to burst. He wanted to cry. Perhaps he did behind his chubby mask.

He sat down presently on the step of the throne to watch the dancing, and to smooth a fold of Floris's mantle across his knee. It was very funny to see the mermen's tails flapping to the music, and the lobsters' claws catching in the hair of the young ladies who were invited up from the boxes to dance with the maskers. But they began to get hazy and far away, and to go "mingledy," as in a dream. Once the face of his grandmother seemed to stand out against the crimson lining of a proscenium box, and Raoul started up joyously. But his legs had become as lead; so had his eyelids. He wondered why. And that was the last he knew of Parade or maskers, King, Queen, or Ball. He was as sound asleep as Rick had been at the Tea.

It was a mermaid, with green, scaly tail, who half led, half dragged, the blue-and-silver page into a dressing-room behind the scenes, and

helped him, still sodden with sleep, into his every-day clothes. It was Cousin Larry who took him home.

"It's been just out-of-sight," said Raoul at his own door, wide awake now. "Say, Cousin Larry, you know I thought I 'd jump out of my skin when I saw Floris!"

"I was surprised myself," prevaricated Mr. Vaughn. "Good night, old man. Mum 's the word, you know, about everything."

"I know," said Raoul with dignity. "But," he added wistfully, "not even to Floris?"

"Well, you can tip her a wink," granted Mr. Vaughn.

The next day, when the Council met in the Council Chamber, Raoul was greeted with a storm of questions. "Oh, Raoul, where *were* you last night? Where did you see the parade from? Was n't it grand? And did you see the Queen? It was *Floris!*"

"Oh, I saw it from several places," said Raoul off-hand. "I was with some boys," which was true.

"Hi-oh!" said Basile gazing up at the February sign, "what 's that hangin' by Zette's Bean?"

For Zette, after Don Carlos's return-party, had brought the bean home; and Rick having remembered that the Natchez Indians used to hang their trophies (trofusses Rick called them) on their walls, she had made a little bag for her Bean; it hung just beneath the Sign of the Taw. Now another bag (of calico), rather clumsily made, dangled beside it. Basile ran up the step-ladder to investigate.

"Why, it 's Raoul's old agate taw," he cried frowning. "What 'd you hang up your old taw for?" he demanded of Raoul.

"Oh," said Raoul, tipping a very broad wink to Floris, who had come in and stood smiling down at him, "I thought it 'd be appropriate."

"Hm," mused Rick, "*The Moon of the Taw.* Why, so it is ap'opriate."

V

THE MOON OF THE SAND-SELLERS

"It 's mighty dry weather," observed Rick one morning in Council, "'n' I 'm goin' to make some medicine for rain."

"Why, Rick," exclaimed Basile, "it rained last week. Hard. The water sloshed out of the cisterns."

"What is makin' medicine?" asked Odille.

"The same as *gri-gri*," returned Rick; "only the Indians, *they* called it makin' medicine."

"*You* can't make gri-gri," scorned Basile. "An' what 's more, nobody wants it to rain. I don't."

"Our washerwoman does," returned Rick. "'Cause her cistern got busted, an' she wants it full-up again. Besides," he added thoughtfully, "people stands under galleries when it rains, an' then you sell more sand."

"Oho, that 's the bug under the rug!" jeered Raoul. But Rick looked at him with such

wide, innocent eyes that he dropped his own eyes, ashamed.

Rick Allison was a delicate little boy; he had never been quite well. Outsiders called him queer because of his solemn, small face and his big eyes, which had a way of looking as if they saw something on the other side of you which you did n't know about. It was understood in the family that Rick was to be humored; the other children indeed could not have told whether in obeying this rule they merely wanted to please the semi-invalid, who was sweet and lovable, or whether they were captivated by his odd notions — for he read a good deal in all sorts of books, and was always making up games and plays out of them. Anyway, they lent themselves joyously to his fancies; and became Greek warriors, Confederate soldiers, Roman legionaries, American savages — according as Rick had been reading or listening to tales of these heroes. For the past weeks they had belonged to the Natchez Tribe of Indians; and they sat, when summoned to a "lodge," hunched on the floor around an imaginary fire, smoking imaginary pipes of peace — or war. They were so seated (in the Council Chamber,

which never changed its name) on this particular morning. It happened to be a school holiday, and as they smoked imaginary pipes they each assorted and prepared the merchandise for the day.

Early in March in this old Latin-American town on the Mississippi, the Sand-Sellers make their appearance, the season opening as regularly and as mysteriously as Kite-time or Top-time or Marble-time. Upon every other door-step, at the entrance to alleyways, just within wide-flung lawn-gates, you will see the boy or girl merchant sitting behind a soap-box, — or in a few instances a squat table, — their wares exposed for sale in little paper boxes or piled like miniature mountains upon bits of cardboard. The sand, which is the sole stock in trade, is colored by the merchants themselves, red, green, yellow, purple, and blue; it will be weighed out to the purchaser upon funny little homemade scales of thick paper. The scale of prices runs from one pin to five pins, or even six according to the weight. Children are of course the steadiest customers; but men hurrying to their offices, ladies out making visits, shop-girls, laborers, — no one seems too

pressed to stop once in a while and invest a pin or two — not always easy to come by! — in a purchase which is of no earthly use to him, or to anybody!

This sand-selling time was now "on."

"My sands is ready," cried Rick, scrambling to his feet, "an' there's the breakfast bell. The lodge is er-er-dismayed."

"Dissolved," corrected Raoul.

"Resolved," said Rick.

Rick and Odille set out their wares at an early hour that afternoon. Their soap-boxes were placed on the very threshold of the street door, which stood wide open by Madame Le Breton's orders. A pleasant breeze swept in from the river, riffling across the piles of gayly colored sand, and setting the paper scales a-swing. Odille sat in a small chair, her round face grave with business anxiety; Rick squatted on his heels; his neck was craned for the first glimpse of a possible customer.

But business remained unaccountably dull; there were few passers-by; Floris strolled out from the courtyard, where she was transplanting violets, and bought four pins' worth; Ikey Rosenbaum, a seller from a neigboring doorstep,

exchanged a pill-box full of green sand for one of blue; then in a rush came three buyers; then a lull which threatened to be permanent.

Odille enlivened the waiting-time with the dressing and undressing of her paper-dolls. But Rick was fidgetty and openly discouraged.

"If it 'd rain," he kept saying, "people would have to stand under our gallery, and then they 'd buy."

Presently he left his "store" in charge of his cousin, and walked around the corner into Toulouse Street. Yes, there she was — Betsée du Pain, the mulatto praline-woman. She was sitting on the banquette with her back against a wall. Her large flat basket filled with pralines and covered with pink mosquito-netting rested upon her knees.

"Good morning, Madame Betsée," said Rick in French, the familiar and home language of the Le Breton household.

"Good morning, 'tit M'sieu," returned Betsée in the same tongue. "How many?"

Well acquainted with Rick's love for this most toothsome of sweets, she uncovered her pralines. Rick had not intended to buy today, but the sight and the smell of those flat

wheels of brown sugar studded with pecans overcame him; he ran to its lair in his pocket the single silver dime which he had, and paid for two of Betsée du Pain's famous "plarines." He tucked one under his arm for Odille, and stood munching the other while he talked.

"Madame Betsée," he said, looking down into her weazened old face, "how does anybody make *gri-gri* for rain?"

"*Ciel!*" cried Betsée, startled. "How should I know, me! And for why does a young gentleman like you want to know about *gri-gri?*"

"How does anybody make *gri-gri* for rain?" repeated Rick calmly. And that compelling power which seemed to dwell in Rick's eyes worked its way. When, after a short conference, he walked away, he was saying the *gri-gri* rain-charm over and over under his breath. "First, you tie a red rag on the cistern faucet; then you say, twice over: —

"'*Ya! Yi! li Gran Zombi*
Qui courri à l' école avec vieux cocodril.
L'appé veni pou' fai gri-gri
Dans 'tit coin bien caché.
Yo! Ya! li Gran Zombi!
Yo! Ya! li Gran Zombi!
Pluie va tomber.'"

This uncouth charm in the *nègre* patois may be translated: —

> Ohé! Oha! the Great Zombi,
> Who went to school with the old crocodile!
> Call him to make gri-gri
> In a little dark corner.
> Ohé! Oha! the rain will fall
> For the Great Zombi.

Rick had tied a strip of red flannel, begged from Maum Angélique, to the faucet of the cistern in the courtyard, and was busy with the "charm" — too busy in fact to notice that the sky had darkened and that the breeze sweeping along the corridor had become a gusty wind. Suddenly, as if a dozen cisterns had been overturned in the sky, a deluge of rain came down. It was one of those tempests of water which in New Orleans are known as "flooding rains." Odille came flying in, her dolls safely housed in her apron, but the Shining Sands, the scales, the chair, the soap-boxes were left to their fate.

Rick, rather elated by the immediate success of his *gri-gri*, hopped upon a low bench under a projecting balcony, and clasping his hands around his knees watched the water spurt from the cistern-top in silvery jets, and leap with the

downpour from the low-hung black cloud into the steadily rising sea in the courtyard. The dark corridor — for the street-door had blown to with a mighty bang — was like a raging torrent; the water rose in the court higher and higher until it swirled almost to the level of the bench upon which the small conjurer sat. Rick began to feel — well, lonesome. The house, running all around the court with galleries and balconies, seemed deserted; and silent, except when the windows rattled in the storm. There was not a soul in sight. Rick's lips trembled; he thought of the Great Zombi who went to school with the old crocodile, and "*Oh, yow! yow! yow!*" he shrieked at the top of his lungs. "*Ow! yow!* Raoul! Floris! *Some*body!"

For Something, scaly and hideous, had come snorting and splashing across the courtyard sea, and planting a pair of clawing forefeet on the edge of the bench, reared its ugly head and blinked at him with small boring eyes, grunting like a pig.

"It's the Old Crocodile," sobbed Rick, in a spasm of terror. "Oh I — want — my — mother!"

He fairly tumbled into the outstretched arms of Raoul, who came dashing out at the shrill cry, and waded across to the bench, shoes and all.

The Old Crocodile — a baby alligator about three feet long — had crawled upon the bench, where it lay stretched out, its tail hanging over the edge into the water.

"Look at it, old man," laughed Raoul, holding the trembling little boy tight in his arms. "It 's nothin' in the world but Felix Bonnard's little old alligator. I s'pose it swum out of their corridor into the street an' kep' on a-swimmin' until it got into ours. It would n't hurt you. It could n't, you know."

"T-take me in the h-house," faltered Rick, burying his face in Raoul's breast, all the spunk gone out of him.

"I 'm never goin' to make *gri-gri* any more," declared Rick, when, stripped of his wet clothes, rubbed down and reclad, he sat sipping an orange-leaf *tisane*, against a possible cold. "Maybe it *was* Felix Bonnard's alligator, but" — he shook his head wisely — "you 'd better not fool with the Grand Zombi!"

By this time the deluge was over. The courtyard, under the late afternoon sunshine, was dry as a bone. So the Great Sun, surrounded by his braves, went down to untie that red rag from the cistern.

VI

THE MOON OF MARIONETTES

THERE was a hand-organ which went up and down Royal Street from year's end to year's end; it was one of the few whose cranks were turned by Italians, the most being carried and ground by negroes. It was different, too; there was no ragtime music in its body, — the tunes were all from operas, familiar to everybody, because everybody in the French Quarter, men, women, children, and babies, black and white, goes to the opera as a matter of course. And it had a set of marionettes, — little wooden figures no taller than your thumb, that came out when Pietro turned the crank, and danced, merrily or slowly, according to the tune. They were fascinating, those marionettes! And while Pietro ground away, he nodded and smiled at them, showing his strong white teeth, and called them by their names, "Fierenza, Giulio, Catarina, Lorenzo, Maria, Francesca," and the like.

Francesca was Basile's favorite, — she had such a coquettish air in her green skirts, and bodice, and straw hat trimmed with pink pin-head roses. Zette preferred Lorenzo, who was dressed like a gipsy and had eyes as black as Pietro's own. Raoul was all for Catarina; and Don Carlos cast his vote for Fierenza, whose hair was golden brown, like Zette's.

"Why?" asked Floris, looking up at the sign, just in place, the letters still wet from the brush. "Why is April the Moon of Marionettes? they dance from January to December."

"Well," said Rick slowly, as if a little uncertain himself as to why; "well," he brightened into confidence, "you see they're fitter to April. Because Francesca has on a straw hat with roses just like your Easter one. An' Easter is in April."

"Why, yes," admitted Floris, "it often is. I had n't thought of that."

Pietro never failed to stop under the Le Breton front gallery, sure of a nickel, at least, dropped down into his battered hat. Even Madame Le Breton liked to listen to some of the airs which floated up in the soft twilight;

they reminded her, perhaps, of days and friends long gone by.

One afternoon Basile Allison, coming home from school with his chum — an uptown boy named Sammy Dickson — stopped to hear Pietro play his favorite waltz from Faust, and to have a peep at Francesca in her green bodice and straw hat (but of course he did not admit this to Sammy Dickson). "I wonder what makes 'em go," he mused. "Say, Pietro, what makes 'em go?"

"They have-a some head-a." Pietro smiled pleasantly and paused to tap his own coal-black head. "They make-a go them-self."

"Whoo!" cried Sammy Dickson derisively. "You think we fellers ain't got no more sense than Rick Allison, hey?"

"You take that back about Rick, Mister Sammy Dickson," shouted Basile, red in the face.

"Oh, I did n't mean nothin'," Sammy said. "You need n't fire up. But them dolls ain't nothin' *but* dolls."

"They have-a *think*," persisted the organ-grinder, shouldering his organ, prepared to move on. "They get-a up een the night-a, an'

dance-a, like-a *thees*." He danced gayly off, organ and all.

"Well," admitted Sammy Dickson, impressed, "maybe they do. I *know* the ghosts dance in the old Ha'nted House down the street yonder ev-e-ry single night."

"Shucks!" said Basile, contemptuous in his turn. "I don't believe it."

"It 's true as gospel," said Sammy. "I know a boy that heard a man say he heard 'em, and *saw* 'em, through a winder. An' he was that skeered, he —"

"Shucks!" interrupted Basile. "He could n't ha' been much of a man! Gee! bet-you *I* could watch 'em an' never turn up a hair!"

"Bet you could n't," sniffed Sammy.

"I could."

"You could n't."

"I could."

"Ye dassent."

"I dass, an' I will, Sammy Dickson."

"You 're too big a coward!" said Sammy, as he marched off in a huff. Basile, tingling at the recollection of the dare, turned in at his own door.

He had not intended to tell anybody at all.

But his twin knew by a sort of twin-instinct that he was hiding something from her. She said nothing that afternoon, nor during the "lodge" the next morning before breakfast. But she cornered him on the stair going down to breakfast, and wormed his secret out of him.

"An' I 'm goin' this very night," he ended doggedly, "to watch them ghosts dance in the Ha'nted House. I 'll show Mister Smarty Sammy Dickson! I 'm not afraid!" He threw up his head, and looked as manly as ever he could.

Zette shivered, but she did not try to dissuade him. "All right, Basie," she said; "we 'll slip off soon 's dinner 's over."

"*We!*" snorted Basile; "*you* 're not goin'! Why, you 're a *girl!*"

"'Cause we must n't be out too late an' worry grandmamma. We 'll not tell her, nor nobody, 'cep' old Jean," — Jean was the butler, — "an' he 'll let us in when we come back, if the ghosts don't squash the life out of us."

This last sentence reconciled Basile to the companionship of a girl. A girl, he thought, away down in his heart, was better than nothing, especially if one was to be squashed; for

Basile was beginning to quake a little in his shoes.

The day passed all too swiftly. Once or twice Basile almost made up his mind to back down; but a glance at Sammy Dickson's smirk face kept his lips shut tight.

"You dassent," shouted Sammy, in front of the whole class when school was out.

"I dass, an' I will," retorted Basile, and ran home in a glow of courage.

The twins stole out soon after dark, unnoticed; Raoul was busy with lessons in the study; Rick, with Odille at his elbow, pored over the Indian book. The elders were gathered with visitors in the salon.

The Haunted House (so-called) stands far down Royal Street. It is a handsome house, and belonged in an earlier day to a Spanish colonial governor. But it has fallen into disrepute and decay; for half a century and more there have been ugly stories afloat concerning one of its owners, — stories of slaves by her orders beaten, chained, tortured, murdered; there are blood stains on the floors, curious ominous signs on the cobwebbed walls. It is occupied occasionally as a tenement house; no-

ONE SMALL GHOST IN PARTICULAR

body, they say, lives there long, because of the ghosts who flit up and down the stairs and dance in the back rooms at night. One small ghost in particular — that of a little negress whom they say her mistress drowned — is said to rise up from a well in the courtyard, and hover about in mid-air, whispering, whispering.

"There 's nobody living in it now," Basile said, as he and Zette sped fearsomely along. "One of the boys' mother's aunt told him that the last ones moved out because —" But Zette had stuck her fingers in her ears.

Basile knew the old mansion well enough. He had explored it in company with Felix Bonnard and a lot of other boys — in the daytime. It is easy enough to laugh at the idea of Things in the daytime!

"You better go back," he said to Zette when they stood before the green batten gate of the courtyard. "That is, if you 're afraid." His own teeth were chattering.

"'Course I 'm afraid," shivered Zette, "but I 'm not goin' back if you 're not. Is n't your dare my dare?" And Basile's heart felt suddenly less like lead in his bosom.

They had to cross the little square court

where the well was, and the little nigger ghost! They were afraid to look up, lest they might see hovering in the air above their heads that dripping wet ghost whining and whispering, whispering. It was awful.

At the top of an outside stair they stopped to take breath and to hold on to each other; then, plucking up all their courage, they tiptoed softly into a gallery room, whose door stood open. The darkness there was past belief; they seemed to breathe it as they sank together in one limp heap to the bare floor. It was as still as it was dark; only the noises from the street, the jingling of an ice-cream wagon, the rumble of a car, the far-away clang of the cathedral bell — striking eight — came in on the light night wind. Some ten or twelve minutes passed; they seemed like so many long-drawn-out hours to the twins, crouching shoulder against shoulder, listening to the loud thumping of their own hearts. Nothing happened. Basile cleared his throat; it was on the tip of his tongue to say with a laugh, if he could pump up a laugh: "Well, *I* don't see any ghosts, do you?" when *z-z-z-z-z! z-z-z-z-z! the whispering was in the room;* above them, near them. They

clutched each other wildly. Zette opened her mouth, but the scream died in her throat. *Z-z-z-z-z! z-z-z-z-z!* The hair on both ducked heads stood on end. A hoarse voice somewhere in the thick darkness ejaculated, "Here I am. Look out. I'm coming."

A shadowy Something swooped down, as if on whirring wings; rose, swooped; and rose again. "The g-ghost out of the well!" Basile strove to whisper, but his tongue clove to the roof of his mouth.

But Zette had found her tongue; one wild shriek after another rent the air; Basile's instantaneous deeper-toned yells filling the intervals. A heavy groan boomed into the confusion, which was further increased by a loud crash as of somebody or something falling.

Suddenly, rapid footfalls echoed along the outer gallery; a light darted in at the open door; a clear voice called out sharply, but in an unknown tongue.

Zette recognized the newcomer, first; she flung herself forward, sobbing, to clasp Pietro's knees. "Oh, Pietro, save us! The ghosts! The ghosts!" she screamed.

It was a moment or two before the amazed

lad could understand what the huddled shrieking heaps at his feet could be. When at length he knew, he stooped to them, reassuring them in a gentle voice, patting their hands affectionately, and wiping away Zette's tears with his red neckerchief.

"Look-a!" he said, swinging his lantern around — it was a bit of candle in a paper bag; Pietro grasped the lower end, and the home-made lantern looked like a softly-yellow moon in the darkness. "Look-a, mees. This ees where I live-a with-a my fadda. My fadda, he keep-a love-bird. They tell-a fortune with-a card. Look-a." Sure enough, there were half a dozen little green love-birds — the very same which Basile had hung over and wondered at many a time in the French Market. They sat on their perch a-row, cuddled one against another in an open cage, whispering softly, their bright eyes like little shiny black beads reflecting the light. Above them, on a high-swung bar, whence he swooped down from time to time on widespread wings, sat the yellow-headed parrot whose duty it was, daily, to hand out to customers the little numbered cards by which the love-birds told fortunes. Basile knew

him well enough too, now that he saw him, the famous talking parrot of the French Market.

Pietro's organ was lying prone on its face in a corner. It had been leaning against the wall, but had toppled over when the old Italian, Pietro's father, — still sleeping soundly and groaning and snoring loudly on his pallet in his dreams, — had jostled its peg with an outflung arm. Hence the terrifying crash.

"You see, signorina," — Pietro showed his white teeth in a brilliant smile, — "dere is nuttin' to hurt-a you. Bud, eet ees al' ri' for peepl' to *theek-a* al'-sort of theengs. I had to keep-a them from rent-a the house. *So*, we live-a here, me an' my fadda, an' we pay nuttin," he concluded with a business-like nod of the head. "Bud, look-a. I show you how dose ghos' dance-a. Ees eet?"

He stretched both arms wide, still grasping the paper-bag lantern in one hand; with the other he swirled the red handkerchief about his head, snapping it at intervals; the love-birds fluttered out of their cage and settled upon his shoulders or clung to his breast; the green-headed parrot, with an unearthly burst of

laughter, which he repeated from time to time, perched on one wrist; the boy thus attended capered about noiselessly and gracefully, the light dipping and rising as he stooped or rose before the open door. Small wonder that the passers-by in the street below, glancing up, hurried on to report still another Ghost Dance in the old Haunted House! Small wonder that the old house remained unlet!

Pietro leaned against the wall presently, the birds *z-z-z-z*-ing on his shoulder, the parrot suddenly silent, but blinking intelligence; and listened while the twins, limp and subdued, rehearsed the story of Sammy Dickson's "dare" and their own consequent visit to the old house. Pietro grinned delight. "Bud," he said anxiously, "you not goin' to tell-a thad Sam-a Deek aboud me an' my fadda, eh?"

"No!" shouted Basile and Zette in a breath. "Besides," added Basile, "we *have* seen a Ghost Dance!"

They had been gone one hour and a quarter by the cathedral clock when they came, flying and panting, back (guarded by Pietro a step or two in the rear) to their own door. A carriage drove up and halted as they approached.

"Oh," cried Zette, spurting forward, "I do believe — *Basie!* They've come! They've come! Mother! Father! *Whoo!*"

They were the very first to greet Mr. and Mrs. Allison, returned from their sojourn in Cuba, where for some months the planter had been studying the sugar outlook. The others came swarming out — even grand'mère — shouting, gesticulating, laughing, asking questions, telling home news. Zette and Basile, who, oddly enough, had not been missed, hung around with the rest while the travelers ate a belated dinner; and they assisted afterward at the ceremony of Opening the Trunks, and the distribution of presents. They sat up late, listening to stories of Cuban life and adventure, and fell asleep in their chairs, whence they were bundled off, protesting, to bed.

It was only in the Council Chamber the next morning that they remembered. The recollection of their escapade came like a dash of cold water on their high spirits. "Oh," groaned Zette, "we've got to tell, of course. I hate telling. I don't mind gettin' punished — so *very* much, but I do hate telling. If they scold you, you feel so shiveled-up. An'

if they don't scold you, you feel so mean and cry-ey."

"'F I was you," suggested Rick safely, "I'd just talk to mother, an' let mother do the tellin' — an' the scoldin'. Mother knows *how* to scold. You're always gettin' into trouble, Zette," he went on severely. "'T ain't but a little while ago that you lost Teddy Magoon."

It was on the tip of every other tongue present to shout, "Who made gri-gri for rain?" But the taunt remained unuttered; poor little Rick, the excitement of the night before had left him so pale!

The same afternoon, Basile, again on his way home from school, again stood listening to Pietro's organ and watching Francesca circle slowly around the little dancing-floor.

"Hullo," said Sammy Dickson, coming up behind him with some boys. "Ye took a dare, did n't ye? When you goin' by night to that Ha'nted House?"

"I 've been," returned Basile in a dignified tone.

"Ye ain't! Say! Cross-your-heart you did?"

"Yep," said Basile.

"By night?"

"Yep."

"Did ye see 'em dance?"

"Yep." Basile winked at Pietro, whose face remained wooden.

"Ye-saw-'em-dance!" Sammy's voice was awestruck.

"Yep," said Basile.

"*Gee!*" cried Sammy, with an admiring whistle.

VII

THE MOON OF DARK TONGUES

It should be explained that Rick Allison's moon-signs did not always appear on the wall of the Council Chamber at the proper —almanac — time; the reason being that, think as hard as ever he might, the Chief of the Natchez could not always hit upon an appropriate legend for the current month. Thus, in May a full fortnight had sped away before the ceremony of the Hanging of the Sign took place.

In the meantime, several things had happened. Madame Le Breton had gone over to France on a visit, taking Mademoiselle Floris Le Breton with her; Mr. and Mrs. Allison, with their own and the Le Breton children, had come to Mandarin, the Allison sugar-plantation in St. Mary's Parish; and the blackberries were ripening. It was this last happening, and the consequent dark purple of his own tongue and those of his fellow-warriors, which had solved for Rick the May problem.

The Council Chamber at Mandarin was the ballroom, — disused in summer, — to which the whole of the third floor was given up. It was a most fascinating spot, having a musician's dais at the upper end, where Rick could sit enthroned, cross-legged, to preside over the "lodge." Tucked away in the green baize covers of violins and 'cellos were various bows which really looked (a little) like long-stemmed pipes; to say nothing of a silver-mounted flute in its own bag, a veritable calumet to a right-seeing eye!

The outlook from the broad low windows at either end was over the vast cane-fields of Mandarin, where the cane at this moment rustled its blue-green blades to the whip of the Gulf wind. To the right of Great House (the plantation house), a few hundred yards distant, stood the sugarhouse, its tall chimneys black against the blue sky, and the many outbuildings devoted to its needs; in the rear stretched the orange grove, enclosing in the heart of its great square the smaller grove of mandarin orange trees, which gave the plantation its name. Still back of these were the trim, white-washed cabins of the negro quarter.

A park-like lawn, flanked by rose gardens and banana walks, surrounded the house.

"We'll go blackberryin' soon's ever Basile gets the sign up," remarked Zette. For Basile, mounted on a step-ladder, was getting both the Balbanca (transplanted from town) and the Dark Tongue legends into place.

"We've got to wait till Unc' Sallum can go with us," sighed Odille, "on account of snakes an'—an' kidnappers."

"Shucks! we boys could kill the snakes," boasted Rick, "an' they ain't no kidnappers aroun' here. Las' summer," he mused on, "Cousin Larry used to kill the snakes. He come to see me all the time las' summer. Now he don't come at all."

"Las' summer Floris was at Mandarin," mumbled Basile, his mouth full of tacks.

"What's Floris got to do with Cousin Larry?" demanded Rick, frowning. A joyous barking of dogs on the lawn below brought him to his feet. "Reckon that's him now!" he cried, running to the window, the others trooping after. Mr. Allison, in his light open buggy, was just turning in at the big gate; some one was seated beside him; for a moment the

watchers could not make out who it was; but when the stranger's hat came off in a flourish to Mrs. Allison on the gallery, the yell which burst upon the air would have done credit to the original tribe of Natchez Indians. "Hi-*oo!* Don Carlos! Don! Don! Hi-*oo!* Hi-*oo!*"

"He's the supprise," panted Rick, stumbling down the two pairs of stairs. "Father *said* at breakfast that he had a supprise up his sleeve. Hi-*oo!* Don, Don Carlos! Hi-*oo!*"

The Strange Boy, a strange boy no longer, had come to spend the summer at Mandarin; he might even stay until Christmas! to share the fun, and the hardships (which meant lessons) of the Mandarin children; to become a part of the home-life, a thing new and wonderful to the motherless boy; "and please, sir," he said to Mr. Allison, his freckled face beaming, "my father says I am to be made to buckle-to."

"Whatever is that?" murmured Basile.

"All right, my son," returned Mr. Allison gravely, "and now, you just bunch in with the rest."

Later in the day they went blackberrying, Uncle Sallum having them in charge. Uncle

Sallum (Solomon), the gray-headed negro Major-Domo of Mandarin, had served the Allisons, father and son, for sixty years and more, "slave *an'* free, *in* the dinin'-room, fum the knife-board *up*," he was wont to explain to visitors.

Odille had, on this as on most occasions, an especial attendant in the shape of Little Calline, a kinky-headed picaninny about her own age. Little Calline toted the tin bucket, while her young mistress carried a box of paper-dolls.

The procession, headed by Uncle Sallum, walking between Raoul and Don, and closed by Odille and Little Calline, went by way of the negro Quarter; thence, through a gap in the Cherokee-rose hedge, into the field beyond, where the big cross-ditch was hung with a thick curtain of blackberry vines. Big Calline, Little Calline's mother, came to her cabin door as they passed to call out: —

"Little Calline, min' you tek good keer o' dat sugar-gal. Ef you don't, I 'm gwine to lamm you good."

"I 'm gittin' too big to lamm," giggled Little Calline, ducking her head, ready to run.

"You is, is you! You sassy limb o' Satan! Ef you was as big as Goliass o' Gass I 'm gwine

to lamm you!" snorted Big Calline. But Little Calline had already showed her a clean pair of (yellow) heels.

"Mammy 's gittin' vi-grous," she observed sedately, slowing down.

The curtain of vines on the slope of the Big Ditch was black with berries, ripe, luscious, tempting, in the sun. They all picked together for a while; it would be more correct to say, they all ate together — except Uncle Sallum, who was mindful of next winter's jam-pots. They stained their lips and fingers a glowing red, and purpled their tongues like a troop of hungry bear-cubs.

"Say," said Don, who by the way "came in" (years and size) between the twins and Raoul, "this beats school! I 'm glad I got the mumps and had to quit. My face was swelled up like one of Rick's moons. That 's how I happened to get asked to Mandarin, you know."

"It don't look that way now," said Rick, with the candor of his years; "it looks like a new moon." They all laughed, Don loudest of all, trooping on after Uncle Sallum toward Chacta Cut Ditch.

Odille trailed along in the rear for a time; but

the zest of the expedition had gone with her appetite for berries; the empty bucket on Little Calline's arm held no reproach for her; her fat legs were tired; they were scratched moreover by the outreaching vines thridding the ditch-path. She stopped short. "Sa-a-y, *Zette*," she shouted, making a hollow of her palms, "I'm ti-r-ed. I'm goin' *h-o-o-m-e!*"

Zette turned; the great white-pillared plantation-house was just beyond the home field, in full view; the Quarter was still nearer. "All right, ba-a-by!" she shouted back. "Go h-o-o-me. But you'll want some of our be-r-r-*ies*. You'll s-e-e!"

"I don't like blackberries," said Odille to her companion, waving a hand to Zette, and turning houseward.

The sun beat down upon her pink sunbonnet; the hot path scorched her shoe-soles; she swerved suddenly into the green coolness of the cane which stretched away from the ditch like a pigmy forest. "We can go back this-a-way just as easy," she said.

"Cert'ny, we kin," agreed Little Calline.

The light between the cane-rows was soft and shadowy; the fitful breeze which swept

through the dim aisles had a feel of salt in it from the Gulf. There was a murmurous and musical sound all about where the graceful cane-blades stirred, and stood still, and stirred again.

Odille and her handmaid, walking slowly, pushed deeper into the cane. Had Rick been with them, he would have dreamed all sorts of adventures; it was the very place for fairies to career about on their dragon-fly steeds; for gnomes to leap and tumble through the tie-vines; for ladies whose names a boy is hard put-to to remember, or pronounce, to step out of cane-stalks — and slip back if anybody runs 'em. But Odille's imagination went no further than her dolls. She threw herself down at length on a bed of vines, and took these out of their box.

"Le's rest awhile," she said. "You can dress Miss Lily Floridawater," — she handed that lady over with her wardrobe, — "an' I'll dress Miss Rosie Bayrum."

"Lawd!" giggled Little Calline, "dem is pretty names. Once, was a owel lived in th' swamp back o' Mandarin; his name was Mr. Stumpwater."

"Oh," cried Odille.

"He's wife, she was name' Mis' Rainwa—ugh, what dat!" Her voice sank to a terrified whisper.

"I did n't hear anything," breathed Odille, trembling.

"Somepn done kick me in de back," whispered Little Calline. "Ouch! *Ouch!*" she shrieked, and made a grab behind her. "Dullaw," she added, "ef it ain't a leetle nigger foot! An' a nigger laig! *An'* a nigger baby!" As she spoke, she dragged forward, successively, the bare foot, the thin, bare legs, and the squirming body of a baby. The little creature, about a year old, was thin and dark, with solemn, unsmiling mouth, and small unsmiling black eyes, which peered out from under a fringe of coarse straight black hair. A slip of bright-colored calico covered the little body.

"In de name o' Gawd," wondered Little Calline, staring down at the baby, which returned her stare with unwinking eyes, "wher' *deed* you come fum?"

Receiving no reply, she proceeded to search the spot where the baby had been lying; there

was nothing — not a footprint, not a rag, not a scrap of anything — to give a clue.

"It 's done crawled heah," said Little Calline, her keen eyes traveling down the cane-row. "Reckon its mammy 's been hoein' in Chacta Cut. But it don't b'long on ou' place. I knows all ou' Mandarin nigger babies. My mammy teks keer of ou'n when th' mammies is in th' fiel'. Dis baby's mammy ought to be skinded."

Meantime Odille had pulled the foundling upon her lap, and was cuddling it and cooing over it. "Oh, it 's too cute!" she cried, "but don't it look *into* you!" The dark, unresponsive baby face might have been made of mahogany; but the bead-like eyes followed Odille's least movement with a piercing gaze.

"Its laigs is all scratched up," continued Little Calline, "so 's its arms; and its mouth is dry. Reckon it 's hongry."

"Oh, Little Calline!" Odille hugged the mite closer to her breast, and stood up. "You can have my paper-dolls. I 'm goin' to take it home. I found it; leas'ways you did; it 's a orpan, an' I 'm goin' to 'dopt it. Come on."

Glancing furtively around, all in a tremble

lest the baby's mother should step out from behind a cane-stalk, the little girl, hugging her treasure, led the way back to the ditch path. It was a zigzag journey, for they had no landmarks to guide them, and they came out of the cane far above the place where they had gone in. The sun was hotter than ever, and the red roof of the Great House seemed miles away; Odille's burden got heavier and heavier; beads of perspiration rolled down her round cheeks and dropped upon the baby's stolid, upturned face. But she refused to allow Little Calline to touch her 'dopted child; she stumbled wearily on; when the time came for crossing Big Ditch, she tripped, fell, and rolled down the embankment to the bottom, baby and all.

"I reckon dat nigger baby 's done killed," said Little Calline, picking them both up. "It 's a Gawd's mussy ef you ain' kill' yo'se'f. An' *den* wha' yo' ma gwine to say?"

But the baby was unhurt, and the small foster-mother trudged on.

They came toiling up to Big Calline's cabin just as the berrying party turned in at the Quarter gate.

"Dis ain' no nigger baby," declared Big

Calline, after she had "honied" over Odille —"mammy's li'l' sugar-gal" — and stormed at Little Calline, upon whom she laid all the blame of the sunburn, and the weariness, and the sore toes of the sugar-gal. "No, dis ain' no nigger baby. Ain't you got sense to know dis ain' no nigger baby, you limb?" — She whirled upon Little Calline. "Why n't you tote it home, anyhow?"

"She would n't lef' me," whimpered Little Calline.

"She would n't lef' you! Hm! You git a tub an' wash sugar-gal's feet. An' den I 'm gwine to lamm you, ef you was as big as Goliass o' Gass."

"But if it is n't a nigger baby," asked Zette, "what sort of baby is it?"

"Injun," grunted Big Calline.

"Oh! Natchez Chief, maybe!" shouted Rick.

"Injun gal baby," said Big Calline.

"Natchez Princess!" shouted Rick again. "We 'll let her be our tribe's princess. I 'll call a lodge. She 'll sit in the middle an' smoke the flute. Ho! Ho!" He strutted proudly about.

For four days the little Indian baby girl

dwelt at Mandarin; four anxious days for Mrs. Allison, and Big Calline, and all the mothers of the Quarter. For the child, dumb and motionless — except for the dark eyes which rolled ceaselessly about ("looking for her mother," sobbed Mrs. Allison) — lay in her cradle, or on a motherly lap, wasting slowly away; she refused food or drink from any hand, even from her little foster-mother, upon whom her eyes seemed sometimes to dwell with less brooding misery.

"If she would only cry," sighed Mrs. Allison on that fourth day, putting down the cup of milk thrust aside by the weak brown hand, "I could stand it better."

"If she just would n't *beg* so with her eyes!" said Zette.

"She 's beggin' fer her triflin' Chacta Injun mammy," sniffed Big Calline.

"Oh," Mrs. Allison declared, "I 'm sure the mother must be dead, or she would come for her baby."

"I 'm her mother," insisted Odille jealously.

"I think she 's jis about starved herse'f to death, Mis' Louise," Big Calline whispered in her mistress's ear. "She got de *look* o' death."

But the Princess did not die; less than an hour after this the mother came — a Chacta Indian (a remnant of which tribe still lingers in lower Louisiana). She was gaunt and wild-eyed and fever-worn. She dropped at the cabin door the great basket of wild herbs, slung to her forehead by a leather thong, and stepping in, noiseless in her moccasins, stood at Mrs. Allison's elbow. "Baby heap lost," she said. "Me heap sick. No know where baby. No know nuttin'."

At sight of her mother the baby uttered a gurgling cry — the first sound that had passed her lips, and held up her wasted arms; as the black head snuggled to the mother's breast, all the other mothers there — the white one and the dusky ones — burst into happy tears.

In broken English the Indian woman explained briefly how, gathering herbs in the swamp back of Big Ditch Cut, she had sunk down, fever-stricken and unconscious. When she came to herself — "no know how long me gone away" — the baby had disappeared from the grassy nest where she had left her. "Me hunt heap. Watch heap. Baby found."

Without further speech, and without the

slightest sign of gratitude or feeling, she stepped out of the cabin with the infant, picked up her basket, and walked away. At the Quarter's outer bound an Indian, doubtless her husband, joined her, and they plunged together into the sea of cane.

"Well! ef dat ain' *Injun*," snorted Big Calline. "Anyhow hit 's a good riddance."

But Odille howled, and refused to be comforted. "I w-w-anted to *raise* her!" she wailed.

The next day the Indian woman's husband, the baby's father, appeared at the front door of the Great House; he was very dirty and unkempt, but very dignified; he asked for Mrs. Allison.

"For lady. Baby send," he said, laying on her lap a bunch of small, exquisitely colored woven baskets.

"For little moder. Baby send," he added, turning to where Odille stood and dropping over her head a string of beads upon which hung an oddly shaped stone pierced with two holes, — the precious totem of his tribe. "Bring little moder heap good luck," he said, looking down upon the little pale-face whom — himself unseen — he had watched hovering

about his own daughter, before the fever-worn mother could walk to the cabin.

"I 'd rather had my 'dopted child," Odille said, after he had gone.

VIII

THE MOON OF THE BUILDERS

"We won't be The Natchez Tribe any longer," Rick announced the day after the visit of the Princess's unkempt father. "Indians ain't what they used to be in the time of Red Shoe an' the Great Sun; they're very dirty; an' they don't carry bows-'n'-arrows an' tommyhawks any more."

"Well, I'm glad," said Zette, getting up from the floor and putting her fiddle-bow pipe back into the 'cello's baize bag. "I'm tired of saying *ugh-ugh* 'way down down in my throat." Zette had been a Warrior; she scorned the part of a squaw, leaving that and, indeed, all feminine rôles to Odille.

"What will we be, then," demanded Basile, with an eye on the new June sign, *The Moon of the Builders*, — "carpenters?"

"Carpenters!" repeated Rick disdainfully, "they're not that kind of builders. They're

— but you 'll know in jew time. We 'll be akerbats."

"What?"

"The sort of people that go about with circuses, you know." Don came to the rescue. "The ground-an'-lofty tumblers; an' the Strong Man, an' the wrestlers. Is n't that it, Rick? Acrobats? Hey?"

"Yes," nodded Rick. "Ackerbats. But we 'll keep the Moons."

"Oh, of course!" cried everybody at once, "we 'll keep the Moons!"

Odille wondered within herself what water-glasses — the only tumblers with which she was acquainted — had to do with circuses. "Why, it 's the pink lemonade," she exclaimed presently overjoyed, and cried when the others laughed.

The floor of the ballroom from this time resounded to the poundings of horses' hoofs, the tramp of elephants, the whir of chariot wheels. The wandering breeze carried out over the cane-fields the roar of lions and tigers, the howl of Siberian wolves, the blood-curdling growl of giraffes; for Rick at once added a menagerie to the circus, himself being the

giraffe, which he imagined as ferocious. But in the side show he became Bingo, the Wild Man, gnashing his teeth, rattling his chains, clawing at the bars of his (chair) cage, his red hair sticking up, his eyes rolling wide. In the circus proper, he was the clown.

"It's a heap more fun than Indians," decided Basile, who played the triple rôle of the Strong Man, the Benjy tiger, and the Trick Rider.

Don Carlos, Ringmaster, cracked his (real) whip. "Trick riders are not allowed to talk in the ring," he said sternly; and Basile's (invisible) horse went on prancing and curveting under him; while Zette, her short skirts puffed out, leaped her (invisible) steed over outstretched (real) cloth banners, and took a header through a (real) barrel-hoop pasted over with newspaper.

This feat almost always ended in a tumble and a wrangle between the Lady Bareback Rider and Raoul, who held hoop and banner.

"You tripped me up a-puppose on that banner."

"I did n't. You 're just awkward."

"I 'm not. An' you don't hold that hoop tipped over enough."

"I do. You 're a girl, and you 're afraid. Girls have n't got any nerve."

But she bore her bumps and bruises boyfully; even Raoul admitted that.

One morning, when lesson-bell rang, it rang in vain. Nobody came to the school-room, not even Rick, who was hand and glove with the tutor because of that young gentleman's rattling description of the Athenian games.

The truth is, the Acrobats did not hear the bell. The circus was in full blast, and the long-awaited moment had come when the Strong Man, who had taken notes at a real circus, would perform the great feat described in a placard on the wall: —

COME ONE, COME ALL!

The Strong Man will Hold an anvil on his Brest
wile his asistent strikes It with a hammer and he will Not flinch.

Basile, the hero, in a striped bathing-suit, came out from behind the grove of baize-clad

fiddles and bowed superbly to the audience (five minutes earlier the Menagerie). After turning a very clever "wheel" around the ring, he stretched himself at full length on his back upon the floor; then, supporting himself on his elbows and hands, he made a kind of bench of his body, and waited.

"Why n't you come on, Rick," he asked, his head hanging backward; "think a fellow can stay here all day?"

"We forgot the brick and the base-ball bat," explained Raoul. "Cubit an' Poke," Cupid and Poker, "have gone after 'em. Hi, hurry up there!" he yelled down the stairs. "Here they come." The two coal-black members of the company, boys about Raoul's age, came puffing in with the things required.

Raoul, in a bathing-suit, advanced solemnly and placed the anvil (brick) on the human bench just below the belt; the ringmaster cracked his whip; and Rick stepped forth, base-ball bat in hand. He raised the bat high in air and brought it down with a thundering whack square on the anvil (brick). The human bench collapsed suddenly, the two halves of the brick dropping to the floor on

either side of him. He clapped his hands to the aching place and screeched at the top of his lungs, "I'm killed! I'm killed!" He writhed about the floor; Rick dropped upon him and yelled and writhed with him.

The uproar greeted Mrs. Allison on her way up the stairs to see what had become of the school. "What is the matter?" she asked, entering; she was too used to the bone-breaking, neck-endangering pastimes of her brood to lose her head, even when Rick ceased his screams and swallowed his sobs to say, "Get my clothes ready, mother. I'll have to go to jail. I'm a murderer."

The Strong Man was pretty sore, and pretty crestfallen for a day or two, but as he got well of his bruises, he got back his self-respect. "If that old brick had n't busted I 'd ha' been all right. Next time I 'll have a real anvil 'sted of a brick."

Two or three days after, they were crawfishing in the ditch back of the Quarter; the crawfish were biting, as a tin can filled with the goggle-eyed lobster-like creatures, squirming in muddy water, testified.

"Come out, you old dobber." Don addressed a big one which hung to the bit of raw beef at the end of his string. "You old dobber," he repeated absently; he landed his prize and dropped it into the can. "Say," — he jigged gayly about, — "I 've found out your Builders, Mr. Rick. They 're crawfish."

"Well," said Rick, "I told you you would. But you 've took a long time."

"Crawfish!" Don went on. "And here 's one of their houses, their castles;" he touched with his foot an odd-looking mud-pile on the edge of the ditch. Other circular structures arose like tiny watch-towers all along the ditch. "I thought of it the minute I said dobber," said Don, "because they look like dirt-dobber (dauber) houses, only bigger. *The Moon of the Builders* — why, that 's just great, Rick. I wonder what they build 'em for; they don't live in 'em."

This is really as great a mystery as the why and wherefore of the mounds of the Mound-Builders!

"Crawfishes builds 'em, but crawfishes don't live in 'em," said Little Calline, who, with Cubit and Poke, was in attendance. "They build 'em for the Squeegers."

The Squeegers, according to plantation lore, are curious monkey-like little men who come up out of the ground at night to see whether the crops are needing rain; in the case of a drought, if the owner of a plantation or a patch be *walkin' straight*, these small people go down and squeege (squeeze) water out of an underground bayou around which they live. And immediately rain falls.

"I done seen 'em myse'f googlin' bug-eyes to'des ou' cane-fields," finished Little Calline.

"Reckon dey don't fin' no crooked walkin' on dish yer plantation — black *ner* white," remarked Poke loyally.

"The sugar mules are coming in!" Raoul exclaimed. "Let's go and see 'em."

A misty haze compounded of dust and sunset-rays hovered cloudlike over the lane leading to the mule-yard and stables. A drove of the mules chosen for their size and strength for work in the cane-fields (hence called sugar mules) came trotting along the hedged lane, flopping their great ears; they turned of their own accord into the yard, and stood about, waiting in dignified patience to be fed.

"My, but they 're big!" said Rick, ad-

miringly, his face pressed against the picket fence.

Blue-Gum Mose, the driver, a burly black giant, swung the gate to its latch, and, stooping, lifted the little boy to his shoulder. Rick put an arm around the great head covered with close-cut wool, and patted the sleek black cheek with his hand. "You're big too, ain't you, Mose?"

Mose laughed, showing his teeth set in those dark gums which gave him his name and his fame in the Quarter. For the bite of a blue-gum negro is supposed by his own race to be more poisonous than the bite of a rattlesnake. "I *got* to be strong an' big, Sugar-man," he said. "Dem mules has to have a whip-han' over 'em. Mules is *vi*-grous."

Rick was struck with an idea. "Mose," he asked excitedly, "do you know of somepn that'll make people big-an'-strong?"

"Lawd, chile," said the negro tactfully, "you's big a-plenty, you is. Ez fer strenk, any old nigger kin have strenk."

"*Do* you?" persisted Rick.

"Well, honey, dar's rattlesnake ile, hit's strenk'nin'; an' dar's goose-grease; ef you rubs

yo' jints wi' goose-grease, hit limbers 'em an' puts strenk in yo' bones.

"Goose-grease," murmured Rick thoughtfully.

Blue-Gum Mose swung up the lane with Rick on his shoulder, the others shouting after and kicking up the dust with reckless feet. He crossed the back yard and set the little boy gently down on the back gallery of the Great House.

"You don't want to be any bigger, Sugar-man," he called back as he walked away, "an' you got plenty strenk."

"I call a lodge," said Rick breathlessly to the troop.

IX

THE MOON OF THE BUILDERS (*continued*)

THE goose pond was in one corner of a large enclosure just off the orange-grove; it was shaded by immense pecan-trees and fringed with blossoming reeds. A dozen or more geese were swimming on its mirror-like surface; others waddled around sharing the clover-dotted sward with ducks, chickens, turkeys, and guinea-fowls; a pair of peacocks strutted about, their tails proudly outspread.

The Acrobats were seated under a pecan-tree, watching the antics of the swimmers and listening to Raoul:—

"We can't take Cuddlecum," he argued thoughtfully, "she belongs to Odille; and Odille is such a cry-baby—"

"I'm not," said Odille; "anyhow, Cuddlecum is too little."

"Nor Splashwater. Rick has had her ever since his old speckled hen hatched her out of

a goose-egg." Rick looked at him gratefully. "And Basie's got so many bruises on him that he can't buckle his belt; I don't think it would be fair to him to take Francesca. She's Basie's goose," he explained to Don Carlos.

Zette was getting red in the face.

"So's," concluded Raoul manfully, "my gander, Red Eye, and Zette's Madame Bonnard are the only ones left. We'll have to kill them —"

"Sacerfice," corrected Rick.

"Sacrifice them. We haven't 'claimed' any of the others."

"I don't believe anybody can catch Madame Bonnard," said Zette hopefully. "Besides, she's not fat. She wouldn't make much grease."

But she looked on heroically while the doomed pair were chased around and around the yard. They squawked and squatted, with widespread wings, and ducked their long necks to avoid an outstretched hand, and made short clumsy flights fenceward — all in vain. Madame Bonnard looked at her (she thought) with reproachful eyes, when Poke finally succeeded in tucking her under his arm. Red Eye, stout old fellow that he was, laid about him

with his wings in such doughty fashion that at least two of his pursuers were worsted before he was taken.

"Zette," said Raoul considerately, "you need n't see Madame Bonnard's head chopped off. You can help Rick and Little Calline build the fire under the pot — "

"I w-want her f-feathers," sobbed Zette, "to remember her by."

"I'll make Cubit pick her," said Raoul, choking a little himself.

It certainly was exciting to sit gypsy-fashion around the round black iron pot — borrowed from Big Calline, who was, for once, unsuspicious — and watch the fire crackle under its short legs, and the thin blue smoke curl into the air. Grief and remorse retired into the background while Little Calline, with a long-handled iron spoon, skimmed the grease from the bubbling stew, and poured it into a baking-powder can. There was a good deal of it, rather watery, and much mixed with pin-feathers; the very sight of it brought pleasing visions of strength and giant-like growth of muscle and bone.

But when Little Calline announced that the

SKIMMED THE GREASE FROM THE BUBBLING STEW

grease was all biled out, a sudden trouble seized Raoul and Zette at one and the same time. Little Calline spoke up as if answering their unspoken thought. "Smells good, dem gooses does. I'll jes' tek 'em to mammy fer sup—" she dodged Zette's angry hand.

"You 're a cannibal, that 's what you are," stormed Zette. "It 's bad enough to make goose-grease out of Madame Bonnard; but nobody 's goin' to *eat* her — not over my dead body!" Grief and remorse had come back!

"Never mind, Zette," Don consoled her, "we 'll bury 'em both, with honor, and put a picket at their head."

Little Calline, much crestfallen, assisted at the funeral; it fell to her, after the grave was dug, to pour into it the savory remains of Red Eye and Madame Bonnard. When the mound under which they rested had been watered with Zette's tears and strewn with clover-blossoms, the Acrobats passed in procession across the gathering dusk to the Great House, bearing the baking-powder box in triumph!

As the next few days passed, a secret disappointment dawned into the soul of the Acrobats. In spite of much and hard rubbing of

joint and muscle with the grease, the expected strength and suppleness did not come.

At last, Zette, nursing a twisted elbow after a bout with the Greek Wrestler (Raoul), voiced the general sentiment: "Goose-grease is no good. Poor Madame Bonnard and Red Eye were murdered — "

"Sacerficed," said Rick.

"Sacreficed for nothin'."

"Besides," remarked the Greek Wrestler, "I 've been thinking of something." He spoke gloomily. "The geese did n't really and truly belong to us. We just claimed 'em."

"Mine does," said Rick, "I had him when he was a egg."

"Yes, Splashwater's yours. But the others belong — belonged — to Tante Louise."

"That's so," admitted Zette, "papa sells my colts without even asking me."

(Mrs. Allison was wont to complain that every living creature about Mandarin was "claimed" by one or other of the children; she declared laughing that she had much ado to have a chicken killed, or to give away a pig!)

"We ought to do something," continued Raoul solemnly, — "pay for Red Eye and Ma-

dame Bonnard — or something. Big Calline says that Red Eye and Madame Bonnard are worth a dollar apiece."

"We can take up a collection," suggested Don.

"You 're not in it," returned Raoul quickly. "You 're our guest." This so wounded Don's feelings that he retired behind the fiddles to sulk, while the dismayed culprits discussed ways and means.

About an hour later, Mr. and Mrs. Allison, sitting in a vine-hung corner of the front gallery, heard a quick rush of feet down the stair and along the hall within; then a sudden stillness. Mr. Allison lowered his newspaper, Mrs. Allison pushed aside her tray of fresh rose-leaves; both were used to these halting approaches, which meant either petition for some unheard-of privilege or confession of some unheard-of prank.

"Uncle Richard," said Raoul, when they finally stood in a huddled line-up before the heads of the house, "we 've been destroyin' your property — again."

"You have?" said Mr. Allison gravely. "Well, what is it this time?"

"Don Carlos is n't in it, 'cause he 's our guest."

Don began an indignant protest; Mr. Allison held up a finger.

"We 've been and killed—"

"Sacerficed," said Rick.

"Sacrificed Red Eye and Madame Bonnard."

Mr. Allison looked so startled that Mrs. Allison thought it wise to murmur: "They are geese."

"What for?" demanded Mr. Allison patiently.

"Well," stammered Raoul, reddening, "for goose-grease; we biled 'em, and—"

"Oh, mother," broke in Rick imploringly, "Blue-Gum Mose said goose-grease 'd make you strong if you rubbed with it; an' limber. An' we wanted it for the circus. An' *I* wanted to be strong — be-be*sides* the circus." He buried his head in his mother's lap and wailed aloud.

Mrs. Allison laughed an odd, jerky little laugh, and lifted him to her knee.

"And," Raoul went on rapidly, "we never once thought of *our* geese being *your* geese;

and when we did think of it we all felt bad. So we took up a collection. Don was n't let to put in, 'cause he 's our guest; besides, he did n't have a cent anyhow. But we 've got only thirty-five cents, and Big Calline says Red Eye and Madame Bonnard are worth a dollar apiece, and — " he stopped abruptly, at the end of his tether.

"An' I 've brought Madame Bonnard's f-feathers," Zette held out a bundle — the feathers, in fact, done up in little Calline's apron; "they 're worth somepn. They 're all I 've got left of M-madame B-b-bonnard."

Mr. Allison hid a purple face behind his paper, but Mrs. Allison drew the little girl to her with a tender arm.

The dejected Acrobats stood around in uneasy silence, awaiting sentence.

"Suppose," finally said Mr. Allison, lowering his newspaper once more, "suppose you work out your debt."

The culprits looked at each other; then they nodded their heads in unison.

"Very well. Put away your money — "

"It 's all mine," whispered Odille; "we broke it out of my bank."

"You may as well begin at once. Get out the hose and sprinkle the front lawn."

A thrill of ecstasy passed along the waiting line.

"We will settle the amount of pay later. One thing more; no circus for the rest of the week."

They went out decorously enough—all except Rick, sound asleep cuddled in his mother's arms. But once outside, a mighty whoop rent the air. If there was one thing above another they loved to do, it was to drag out that hose and water the lawn. "And he thinks he 's *punishin'* us," giggled Basile to his twin.

"*Maybe* he does," said Zette sagely.

X

THE MOON OF PIRATES

"Our plantation is a cotton-plantation," said Don Carlos. "The fields are like snow, in the fall, when picking-time comes on. It looks pretty then. But a sugar-plantation is pretty all the time. Just look at the cane now!" He waved an arm toward the great blue-green sea which billowed under the midsummer sky. The stalks, row by row, measured more than nine feet in height. From where Raoul and Don stood by one of the ballroom windows looking down, the beautifully kept plantation-roads which crossed and recrossed the fields were like a brown network dividing the green into clear-cut squares. "It all looks so easy too," continued Don. "In cotton, you're never laid by, and you're never sure, up to the very last, that there won't be a drought, or cotton-worms, or something. And when we get a *crevasse* on old Mississippi, *Gee!*"

"Easy? a sugar-plantation easy?" cried Raoul. "Well, it may look easy. But sugar-cane's never laid by either. Uncle Richard says he always sleeps with one eye open, to see what'll happen next."

The boys descended the two flights of stairs and walked arm in arm across the side-yard and along the lane beyond, where the plantation-shops were; the stroke of hammer upon anvil echoed from the blacksmith's shop, where tires and horseshoes, chains, links, and bolts were being forged or mended; in the cooper's shop skilled workmen were at work making barrels for the forthcoming crop of sugar, and piling them, immense fragrant mountains, in rear sheds; in a smaller shop near by, the harness, saddles, straps, collars, hames were undergoing repair. From the sugarhouse itself came ringing the keen sharp *clang-clang* of the expert's hammer, testing the boilers from the inside to see if they were sound. "Looks kind o' busy, don't it," remarked Raoul, carelessly.

"It sure does," said Don.

At the plantation store, whither they were bound, they found the usual crowd of buyers and idlers. The plantation store is the centre

of plantation news; all the doings of the small world are here retailed, discussed, done up with the packages of rice and beans, or the bundles of calico and flannel — to be carried home by the buyers. The two boys, when they entered, came upon a not unusual scene: a youngish man in blue cotton shirt and jeans trousers sat on the counter, swinging his legs as he talked; a dozen or more men, black and white, stood about listening. "I know what I 'm sayin'," he was declaring doggedly, "I 've seen the place with my own eyes."

"What place, Joe?" asked a newcomer.

"Why, where Lafitte the Pirate buried his chest of gold and jools. It 's on the far edge of the Tremblin' Prairie, where three lone live-oaks grow close together in a triangle. I seen it when I was a little chap and did n't weigh more 'n a fo'th of what I weigh now. Ole man Kinchler showed it to me. He was about as heavy as a feather."

"Why n't you go and get it?" demanded one of the circle.

"Me? Why, that shakin' bog 'd draw me under before I got anywheres near it; that 's why. You-all know what that shakin' bog is!"

"How did Lafitte the Pirate get there with his chest?" asked Don. "It must have been pretty heavy."

"He went 'round, bayou-way," said Joe. "But you can't find them trees by bayou-way, now. I've tried. I reckon Lafitte said a charm over 'em. Nobody 'll ever get as close to 'em as I did, for that prairie shakes worse 'n ever. Gimme my beans. I got to go."

Don and Raoul followed him out; they did not know that Joe's "yarn" was one of the stock stories of the store. Joe laughed at their eagerness; but he stooped and traced in the dust of the road a rude diagram of the place about which he had been talking, and the way thither.

"You chaps can play you're Lafitte and his lieutenant," he said, mounting his horse. "I used to do that when I was a boy."

They looked at each other, breathless, not speaking a word until he had galloped off. Then they nodded their heads. "We'll get it," said Raoul, his black eyes dancing. "We're light."

"But how will we bring it out?" asked Don as they raced back to the house.

"Oh, just a little at a time. It's in ingots, I suppose."

"Or doubloons."

"Yes, and necklaces, and rings, and pearls, and diamonds. We'll give Floris and Zette and Odille the necklaces; and mother can have a lap-full of doubloons; and father can take an ingot whenever he wants it."

"I'll pay off the debt on Happy Thought Plantation — father says there's always a debt on Happy Thought."

"We'll have a yacht together, or an automobile!"

Mrs. Allison listened with but one ear while Raoul preferred his request for the use of two horses; she hardly heard him. When he explained, rather vaguely, that they were going on an "expedition," and hinted broadly at the good fortune in store for the family, "Why, certainly," she said; "take the horses; your uncle will not mind. Tell Solomon to put you up some lunch. And be sure and get home before dark."

She kissed them both and went back into the room where Rick lay in his bed tossing from side to side and moaning. For poor little

Rick was in the clutches of the malady which had kept him from "getting strong."

"He's not very bad off, is he, Tante Louise?" asked Raoul from the door.

"Oh, no," she said, smiling, for Rick's fever-bright eyes were upon her. "You boys may come in for a minute."

"We're goin' after the Treasure of Lafitte, the Pirate of the Gulf," whispered Raoul, bending over the flushed face on the pillow, "don't tell."

"I won't," said Rick earnestly; "I wish I could go."

"You can—next time," promised his cousin. "You'll have to help bring out the ingots."

The sick boy smiled joyously.

The Trembling Prairie was a little more than eight miles from Mandarin Plantation. Raoul had seen it several times, wonder-eyed, from the little-traveled road, over which Mr. Allison occasionally drove; it lay some four or five hundred yards distant, an open expanse dotted here and there with swampy pools. On the farther side stretched a line of cypress trees and live-oaks, which marked the course of

Bayou Jaune. It looked innocent enough, the Trembling Prairie, with its grassy, sunburnt, level surface; but grewsome stories were told of the quicksands below. These trembling prairies, common in lower Louisiana, were in fact once open lakes or pools over which a slight crust of earth and vegetation has formed; the waters beneath have thickened to an ooze whose sucking depths are dangerous for any unwary creature, man or beast, caught in their embrace.

The two boys, who had devoured their lunch while yet in sight of home, left the beaten road at a given point and trotted their horses across a sort of natural meadow dotted with pecan-trees; they dismounted on the edge of the prairie, tethered their horses, stripped off their jackets and removed their shoes and stockings — all in profound silence. Then, shouldering each a stout picket, brought along in lieu of a crowbar, they stepped out upon the sunburned grass.

"Why, it don't shake at all!" cried Don tiptoeing gingerly along. Finding the ground steady under their feet, they began to laugh and shout, and to walk more boldly. They even capered a little. But at once both uttered

a sharp cry and stopped stockstill in their tracks. *Had* there been a slight quiver along the grass? as if a snake had wriggled under it?

"Shucks," said Raoul, "it was n't anything." They went on, but more soberly. But again the tremor, this time not to be mistaken, and prolonged; it was like the curious senseless shaking of *blanc mange* in a bowl! They leaped forward, swift as a pair of frightened deer, running for dear life, their bare feet hardly touching the turf, which gave spongily at every step.

"We'll never see Mandarin again," whispered Raoul hoarsely, without turning his head, "it 's suckin' us in."

"Throw down your picket," whispered Don back, knee to knee with his flying companion. Raoul dropped the picket.

They did at length reach the further side of the prairie. Here the ground rose a little, as if it might be the outer rim of the old lake; it was clothed in green grass and shaded by moss-hung trees. The boys flung themselves forward and fell at full length, pale and trembling, embracing the solid earth with outspread arms, and lay there face downward, panting, unable to speak.

"You reckon we 'll ever get back?" they asked each other at last.

"It 'll suck us under, and they 'll never even find our — our bodies," shuddered Raoul.

"I know it," agreed Don with a quiver in his voice.

But courage gradually returned. "Anyhow," said Raoul, rolling over and jumping to his feet, "now that we are here we might as well look for the Three Trees and the Treasure. Why, hello, Don, you kept your picket!"

"Yes. You know I'm lighter than you are," Don explained. "It will come in handy to pry open the chest with."

They walked about the wooded strip which followed the course of the bayou, gleaming yellow under the noon sun. They consulted from time to time a pencil copy of Joe's road-chart. "I b'lieve he was just foolin'," said Don, disgusted. "There 's not *two* live-oaks together anywhere, much less *three*." He threw down his picket.

"I s'pose you 're right," admitted Raoul, —"his mouth looked kind o' twitchy. It was awful mean of him."

"He did n't think we 'd come," Don said kindly.

They trudged back to the spot where they had "landed" from the shaking bog. Cold terror clutched at their hearts; their throats swelled; tears, furtively wiped away, rose to their eyes.

"Let 's go across higher up," suggested Raoul. "It don't look so — so — there."

"All right," returned Don. "Raoul," he broke out, as they stood ready to make the plunge, "if anything — happens to me, tell my father — "

"Oh, *don't!*" shouted Raoul hysterically. "If anything does, won't it happen to me too? Come on!"

The very first step set the ground a-tremble, and filled their ears with a curious slushy gurgling sound. The race back was really one for life or death. Halfway across, the crust broke under Raoul's winged feet; he sank to his knees in the ooze. Don, dragging him out, felt the slime about his own ankles, and then, while Raoul tugged at his wrists, crying aloud, he went down, down, as if a hand had reached up and gripped his legs. They never could remem-

ber, either of them, how they got out and across to dry land. Don had a dim memory of thinking once when he stumbled that he would not try again to get up; he also recollected that his outflung hand had closed mechanically upon some object that it touched.

Covered with ooze, spent, terrified, beside themselves, they pitched once more on their faces upon the hither side of the prairie. Lying there, they wept and prayed aloud, sobs choking their throats. Afterward they walked unsteadily to where they had left the horses.

"Look, Raoul, what I've picked up," Don said, stopping short. "I'd forgot it." He drew out of his bosom, where he had thrust it as he ran, a small poniard, or dagger, sheathless, with slender, much-rusted blade and a cross-handled silver hilt, also rusted and discolored.

"Maybe Lafitte the Pirate of the Gulf dropped it himself," said Raoul, but without enthusiasm.

"I'll give it to Rick," said Don.

It was a very forlorn pair of boys indeed that, about sunset, stepped upon the wide front gallery of the Mandarin Great House. Their hearts quaked like the quaking bog itself! "It's

because Uncle Richard and Tante Louise are so awful good to a fellow when he 's done something he ought n't to," Raoul explained his share of the quaking to Don in an undertone, as they entered the hall; "I hope they will punish us. I 'd feel better."

"So would I," agreed Don.

Mr. Allison was standing at the library door, talking to the family doctor; the faces of both men were very grave. Mr. Allison listened to the breathless jumble of words poured out by the treasure-seekers, and looked at the dagger. "Yes, yes," he said, "run along now, boys." It was many days before any one at Mandarin had time to realize what their story meant.

"Can I give the dagger to Rick?" asked Don eagerly.

Mr. Allison began to shake his head; but the doctor said, doubtfully, "It might rouse him; it can do no harm."

Little Rick was very, very sick.

Don approached the bed on tiptoe, and fell on his knees by its head. Rick's face had grown ghastly pale; his eyes were half closed; one hand hung inert and listless over the side of the

bed, his mother held the other. She looked at Don with a face so changed that he trembled.

"Speak to him, Don," she sobbed. "Call him. Maybe he will come — once more."

"*Rick!*" breathed Don with his face close to the little boy's cheek; then, louder, "*Rick!* Don't you hear me? It 's Don."

"Don!" the fluttering eyelids rose slowly. "Why, Don," he said dully.

"Yes." Don's voice was eager; he fumbled in his bosom; it seemed to him as if he would never get that dagger out! And the long-fringed eyelids were closing again! "Yes, Rick; and look here. We found Lafitte the Pirate's own dagger, and we 've brought it to you. Look-a-here, *Rick!*"

Rick's blue eyes widened; a gleam of intelligence flashed into them; a smile stirred the pale lips. He took the dagger, raising his head a little to look at it.

"*The Moon of the Pirates,*" he said drowsily; the dagger dropped from his hand to the floor. The light faded from his face; he sank back into the death-like stupor from which Don's voice had aroused him.

XI

THE MOON OF PIROGUES

For many days a heavy cloud hung over Mandarin; every soul on the plantation, black and white, loved little Rick, and little Rick was nigh unto death. The Great House was like a place deserted, except for the one room where one little boy lay, fighting for his life. There, nurses and doctors moved about noiselessly; Mrs. Allison, courageous, calm, helpful, but with a strained look in her sleepless eyes, rarely stirred from the bedside; Mr. Allison walked back and forth ceaselessly on the long galleries; the children crept about frightened and miserable, telling each other in whispers how good and unselfish and sweet-tempered the sick boy had always been, and shrinking remorsefully from the remembrance of the least meanness they had ever shown him. The Council Chamber was abandoned; dust gathered on everything there.

"He was bawn at Mandarin, li'l' Marse Rick," Blue-Gum Mose said with a click in his throat. "Seem lak dem sugar mules trots mo' easy, caze dey knows Sugar-man is sick."

"Does you think li'l' Marse Rick gwine to die, Mammy?" asked Little Calline of her mother.

"Shet up," scowled Big Calline, "who say Sugar-man gwine to die? Don't you dassen to open yo' haid agin. I gwine to lamm you, ef you was big ez Goliass o' Gass!"

At last, one day, the tension was loosened; the news spread from the Great House to the Quarter, and from there over the cane-fields: *Rick knew his mother!* Getting well, the doctors said, was but a question of time. The cloud was lifted from Mandarin. "Look at dem sugar mules," chuckled Blue-Gum Mose, "friskin' lak puppies! *Dey* knows Sugar-man knows his ma!"

But as the days passed, the frail, bloodless boy, though free of fever and conscious, seemed to become more frail and bloodless still; he remained listless and dull, with eyes closed, or staring at the ceiling; the skin lately scarlet from fever grew purple, and a rash broke out

which bade fair to sap the small strength which remained. The doctors confessed themselves baffled; and the cloud, lifted for a moment, settled again over the plantation.

One morning the old family doctor said in answer to a question put by the despairing mother: "Yes; do so if you wish."

"It will at least give her something to think about, poor child," he said to himself, riding away.

Mrs. Allison watched him pass out of the gate; then she turned to her husband. "Richard," she said quietly, "I want you to go after Marie l'Ombre."

"Marie l'Ombre!" Mr. Allison fairly gasped; it was as if he had been told to fetch the Queen of Sheba. Marie l'Ombre (Mary, the Shadow), the old negress, who was supposed to possess secret powers of healing, and of whom the people of her own race stood in awe, had never been known to leave her lair in the Cyprière at any one's bidding. She prescribed herbs and powders to those who sought her at the *ilêt*, or island, where her cabin stood; even this she sometimes refused to do. But she visited no man's house.

"She will not come," Mr. Allison said gently.

"Oh, Richard, *try* to bring her, try." Mrs. Allison's head went down on her husband's shoulder; for the first time since Rick's illness she broke down utterly.

"Don't, Louise," entreated Mr. Allison. "I will go. And I will bring Marie l'Ombre back with me — if I have to put her in a bag like a cat." The last words were muttered between his teeth.

He drove out of the gate twenty minutes later in his own light trap. Basile was on the seat beside him. Raoul and Don galloped alongside on horseback. Zette had not even asked to go. She crouched, with Odille and Little Calline, in the passage leading to the sick-room.

"Marie l'Ombre kin tell the minute she sets eyes on you if you gwine to die or git well. She kin tell if you swallered a pin. You don't have to tell her nothin'. She got voodoo eyes."

"Oh!" shivered Zette.

"She 's ez high as dis house. She got fingers long ez Marse Richard's buggy-whip, an' when she crook 'em at you, you got to foller."

"It 'll kill Rick to look at her!" said Zette.

"Lawd! ef you gwine to *live*, Marie l'Ombre ain't skeery. *Den* she look des like *pie*. An' when she waves dem fingers you feels good in yo' bones."

The Cyprière was about as far east of Mandarin as the Trembling Prairie was toward the west. The road ran first through the cane-fields, where the cane overtopped the horsemen and swallowed up the buggy; then by one of the plantation gates they passed into the rutty road that led to the *cabane* of old Jacques Lange, the moss-gatherer.

Jacques himself answered Mr. Allison's hail from the rear of the cabin, where he was hanging the moss he had just brought in — and which looked like thick tresses of gray hair — on the fence.

"Yaas," he said, when Mr. Allison had explained his business. "I take you to the *ilêt* of Marie l'Ombre; but you will nevaire breeng Marie l'Ombre at your house. She weel not come; not for no money. Marie l'Ombre she weel not leave her *ilêt* for King of France. It is as I tell you, M'sieu'. But I take you, yaas.

One, two, t'ree pirogue," he calculated; "you can paddle dose pirouge, hein? Dose boys, they can paddle pirogue, hein? Vairy well."

They walked over to the bayou, sluggish and dark, which here entered the cypress forest. In a few moments the long pirogue paddles were flashing in and out of the water; the slim, graceful craft following, one after the other, like a flight of birds. Jacques led the way, sitting in the foremost; Raoul and Don, skillful paddlers both, spun after, one at either end of the second boat. Mr. Allison, with Basile, brought up the rear. Though the sun was high in a cloudless sky, and the world outside was bathed in golden light, the Cyprière was cloaked in gloom; the dark surface of the bayou and the still swamp-water on either side reflected only the inky foliage of the giant cypresses, with their streamers of gray moss and their odd bare gray knees. Here and there the scarlet of the poison ivy caught the eye, or a cluster of bayou lilies standing up snow-white in a mass of sombre reeds. The silence was uncanny; the grunt of an alligator, the flapping of a heavy-winged bird, the croak of a bullfrog, alone spoke of life. The steady

beat of the paddles moving in unison echoed strangely through the long cypress aisles. Not a word was spoken in the boats except when Jacques, turning a bend, shouted back caution, or direction.

A little more than an hour of paddling brought them into view of the *ilêt;* here the trees fell away in every direction, leaving an open space where the water became suddenly blue under the blue sky. In the centre of this natural clearing, surrounded by the shallow water of the swamp, lay, a foot or two above the pool, the small island upon which, in the midst of a green garden patch, stood the *cabane* of Marie l'Ombre. The porch was hung with vines, and strange herbs grew knee-deep around the steps.

Jacques was leaning forward, ready to shout a warning halloo; but there was no need. As the pirogues swept out of the shadows, Marie l'Ombre appeared upon the porch of the cabin. She walked to the landing, and stood waiting. She was a tall, slim old woman. Except for her color, she looked little like a negress. Her lips were thin, her nose straight, her worn face was stern, the sunken eyes were searching. But

"I KNOW YOU COMIN'"

when she smiled, which was rarely, her features seemed overspread with a kindly light. She was neatly dressed in dark blue calico, with white kerchief and a high plaid turban. She carried a small basket on her arm.

"I know you comin'," she said in *nègre* patois to Mr. Allison, before he could speak. "I waitin'. I go at your house, now."

"Why," said Mr. Allison, taken aback, "how *could* you know!"

"I hear that mother callin' in the nighttime. An' the little boy, he stretch out dose arms for me. I ready, I go."

Jacques, the Cajan, threw a half-frightened glance over his shoulder as she stepped into his pirogue; but with a whirl of his paddle he veered about and headed the procession homeward.

Marie l'Ombre, when she came into the sick-chamber, stood erect by the bed and gazed long and earnestly at the child. Mrs. Allison hung on her gaze with hope, which sickened into fear when the Wise Woman did not speak.

But after she had laid Rick's wasted body in a warm bath strengthened by the thick leaves

of the *patate de guinée* (potato vine) and bound a cooling plantain leaf on his aching forehead, and set to his lips an orange-leaf *tisane*, Marie l'Ombre drew a long sigh; she touched the bowed head of the poor mother. "He get well, now. An' dose sore; they go by two—t'ree days. You see."

He did get well; not slowly and painfully, as might have been expected, but so quickly that it seemed almost like a miracle. The eruption sloughed off in those odd herb-baths, leaving the skin soft and clear, like a baby's skin. Appetite and interest in things came back together. "He never be strong, that little boy," said Marie l'Ombre, "But he *well*. He make *plenty magic* befo' he die!"

When she went back to her island, Rick himself went with her and his father as far as the moss-gatherer's cabin. She pushed back the roll of money which Mr. Allison held out to her at parting. "Me, I take not'in'," she said quietly, "for why you think I am called in the night-time? Is it to make my hand black with money? No, it is for *save life!*"

Tears rose to Mr. Allison's eyes as he watched the pirogue sweep into the dusk of the

Cyprière with old Jacques at the prow and the Wise Woman at the other end. Rick wept aloud, "Come back Marie, Marie l'Ombre," he shouted, "I 've got a pain in my h-heart. *Come back!*"

XII

THE MOON OF UNWILLING FEET

"Now, we can be gypsies. I always wanted us to be gypsies."

This was what Rick said when he saw the Tent. It appeared one morning on the front lawn near the entrance to the Banana Walk. It was quite large, made of red and white striped cloth, and there was a white streamer flying from the pole with a large *M* in red upon it. When this streamer was above the tent, Mr. Allison explained, it meant that the family was at Mandarin. The tent was a gift to Rick "for getting well;" anything happier or more jubilant than Rick may not be imagined.

The Band of Gypsies, which included Cubit (christened Cupid) and Poke and Little Calline, as Hirelings, — which had a lofty sound, and was really appropriate, — at once took possession of the tent, the Council Chamber, for the time, being abandoned. They sat in it

during the sunny part of the day, lessonless, for the tutor had given the unruly flock up in despair and gone away. They made daring sallies into the rose garden, beyond the Banana Walk; even into the vegetable garden on the other side, bringing back booty in the shape of rose-leaves, green bananas, radishes, onions, okra pods, and the like. At dusk they kindled little fires under one of Big Calline's kettles and gathered around, smoke-harried but blissful.

But one day a bomb-shell dropped out of a clear September sky into their midst. *They were to start to school* — regular, sure-enough *school!* — the next day, the whole of them, even Don Carlos. "You will go into the village daily to school," Mr. Allison told them, as they stood overwhelmed before him. "We think it best for you all — and for us," he added in a smiling aside to his wife. Don's father, on a visit to his old friends at Mandarin, joined heartily in the plan, glad to have his boy remain under Mrs. Allison's care. The village was about three miles distant.

Grief and indignation pervaded the Gypsy camp; the tent during that part of their "last day," as they mournfully called it, which was

not devoted to hunting up slates, copy-books, pens, pencils, and the like, was the scene of revolt.

"School!" raged Raoul. "I thought school was for town! And here it is 'most grinding-time! Oh, Don, you don't know how much fun we're goin' to miss at grinding-time. We won't have more 'n two or three hours a day to be at the sugarhouse." Don groaned in sympathy.

"An' I 've got six teenchy-weenchy ducks jus' hatched," wept Odille.

"Ducks!" Zette burst out. "What I hate is strange girls. And I never *can* do a sum when they look at me!"

"Anyhow," philosophized Basile, "we can play baseball at school."

Morengo (Rick), the Gypsy Chief, said nothing for a long time; his head, as he lay on his stomach in the grass, was propped on his hand; he was thinking furiously. "It 'll be the Moon of somepn that don't want to go somewhere," he mused. "The Moon of Snails? no, that won't do; they have n't got any feet. The Moon of Not-wanting-to-go? Moon of Slow Feet. Ha, that 's it. The Moon of Slow Feet. You can fix up the sign, Basie."

At Don's suggestion it became *The Moon of Unwilling Feet.*

It *was* a Moon of Unwilling Feet; not a gypsy "took" to that village school, where lessons were hard, and order was kept; as if tents were not; nor grinding-time in the air; and where gypsies were supposed to know the multiplication table. There was always some one to wait for when the surrey came around to carry them to the village, — Zette, or Raoul, or Basile. Nearly always a pile of books was left behind and the surrey had to wait while Poke came back for it. The heads of the house, however, shut their eyes to these signs of discontent, and hoped for better things.

At the end of a fortnight the secret revolt became open rebellion. It began late one afternoon; the first word of it was spoken by Zette across the smoke of the gypsy camp-fire. "I hate school," she said, "that is, school when we 're at Mandarin. I 'm a good mind to hide out to-morrow an' not go at all." From this seed the plot grew.

They were all ready in time the next morning, a demure group with their books and their lunch baskets. There were two of the latter,

one for the boys, one for the girls. They got into the surrey and rattled away, Poke on the driver's seat, but at the first turn in the lane the old family horse was brought to a stop, and the gypsies piled out, bag and baggage. Poke, grinning and nodding approval, made a circuit of the home field and drove into the stable yard, where he unharnessed and stabled the horse.

Up through the Banana Walk, stooping to the ground like a covey of partridges, came the "hookeys;" a quick dart, one after another, across a flower-bed and they were all safe under the flap of the tent, and rolling on the grass in spasms of hushed glee. Through the peephole toward the Great House they could see Mr. Allison reading the city papers on the front gallery. There was no one else in sight, so that Little Calline, Cubit, and Poke succeeded in getting into the tent unnoticed. It was great; the sinners sat around in a circle, with their legs crumpled under them, and said how great it was! They played mumble-peg, they ate the boys' lunch, calculating that, by now, it must be about twelve o'clock.

"If papa would only go in," said Zette, applying her eye to the peephole, "we could

run up and down the Banana Walk. My legs are gettin' tired."

"So 's mine," admitted her twin. "But say, it 's great, ain't it! Just about now, if we was at school, the old bell would be ringin' for us to come in, after lunch." At that moment the grandfather clock in the hall of the house began slowly to boom out the hour. They counted.

Ten o'clock. "Gee!" said Raoul.

And then a deep silence fell upon the tent.

"You started it, Zette," said Basile finally.

An angry flush came into Zette's cheeks. "We're all in it," said Don quickly; and that storm was averted.

"I wish I had some water," said Rick.

"So do I," chorused the others.

"I done fotch a leetle bottleful," said Cubit; he drew out of his bosom a squat bottle and held it out to Rick. "I knowd li'l' Marse Rick 'd git thusty."

Rick's fingers closed over the bottle; he took out the cork and raised it to his lips; then with a turn of the wrist he emptied the water on the ground. "I won't drink lessn my — my follerers can have some, too. That 's

the way Sir Philip Sidney did at the battle of — I forget which battle — "

"Oh," interrupted Basile at the peephole, "papa's gettin' up; he's goin' in. No, he's standin' on the steps; an' there's mamma by him. Hello, a carriage's comin' around the drive. Two carriages, an' a buggy. Well!" in a tone of deep disgust, "I do b'lieve they've got a dinner here to-day."

So they had; this was partly why the Master of Mandarin had stayed the morning on his front gallery; and why Mrs. Allison wore a white fluffy gown.

This is a chronicle of the children at Mandarin, so there has been no mention of the doings of their elders there. Mandarin, like most Southern plantations, was the scene of much and frequent hospitality and gayety. There was constant coming and going of guests from the city; there were breakfasts and dinners and suppers, — famous as well for their dishes as for their good cheer, — to which came the neigboring planters and their guests. The month or so preceding the grinding is especially gay. Later, the grinding absorbs the men.

Uncle Sallum came out to assist the ladies of Rosebank from their carriage — they had driven fifteen miles — and the ladies of Eastland, ten good miles distant, and of Good Luck, seventeen miles, and so on. The old man's bald head glistened in the sun as he bowed the guests up the steps. Maum Angélique, with several under-maids, took hats and gloves, and brought out chairs. There was a gay buzz of voices; the men walked about the galleries talking, or smoked on a side porch. "Twenty-two," counted Raoul; "that means the long table."

"Talkin', talkin', talkin', like at Balbanca," said Rick, peering under the flap.

"Anyhow we'll get some of the dinner," said Zette. "They'll put it up for us until we come home from school." A forlorn attempt at a laugh went around the circle.

"Shh," whispered Don. His quick ears had detected approaching footsteps on the soft grass. They cowered low, afraid almost to breathe.

"Yes," said Mr. Allison, just outside. "It is the children's play-tent. They are in town at school. Rick? Oh, he is quite well again, thank you."

Every gypsy of the tribe hung a shamed head. Mr. Allison and his guests passed on.

It would not be easy to describe the feelings of the prisoners as that long day wore to a close. Hungry, thirsty, tired, cramped, cross, miserable, they watched the progress of the dinner. "I reckon they'll eat forever," growled Raoul.

The double windows of the dining-room, alas, commanded a full view of the tent. In spite of this they decided more than once to dash out as they had dashed in; but fear and shame held them fast. There were several climaxes: one was when the diners finally arose from the table; another when, horror of horrors! the younger men and girls took to promenading the Banana Walk. Rick and Odille had long been asleep, and so, happy; the others grew stiffer yet with despair.

At length, toward six o'clock, the stately line of vehicles and saddle horses came around, the sleek black drivers as full of dinner as their masters and mistresses, and with lingering good-by the guests finally departed.

Mr. Allison looked up as the forlorn band came up the steps.

"Well!" he cried, "had a pleasant day, haven't you! No geography, no arithmetic, no — no dinner!"

The children stopped short, dumbfounded. They looked at each other, their eyes fairly rolling with terror.

"Go into the dining-room." Mr. Allison's voice had become stern. "Solomon will give each of you two slices of bread and butter. Rick may have a plate of soup besides."

"I d-don't want nothin' the other gypsies c-can't have," whimpered Rick.

"And then you will go to bed — all of you. You too, Don Carlos."

"Yes, sir," said Don gratefully. "I 'm in it deep, sir."

"I am ashamed," continued Mr. Allison, "and I am troubled —"

"Oh, father," wailed Zette, "*don't* be *troubled.* It 's all my fault. An' I 'll never, never *want* to play hookey again."

"None of us will," said Raoul, "and we're all to blame."

"C-can't you forgive us?" pleaded Rick. "Mother, *make* father forgive us!"

"We 'll see about that to-morrow," con-

ceded Mr. Allison, smiling a little; "run along."

They scampered into the dining-room, where Uncle Sallum and his assistants were putting away the wonderful Mandarin silver. The old man cut the slices of bread very thick, and the spread of butter was very generous.

"I did n't know just bread an' butter could be so good," mumbled Odille.

"Neither did I," Basile mumbled back.

"Is n't papa the *best* man!" said Zette, "an' were n't we *pigs* to act like we did!"

"Gypsies," said Rick, "is of-ten wild."

XIII

THE MOON OF SHINING BLADES

Choo-*hoo!* Choo-*hoo!* The smoke came belching out of the sugarhouse chimneys with a steady, rhythmic choo-*hoo!* choo-*hoo!* that would not cease for a single second, day or night, until the grinding season was ended. It was the nineteenth of October; the grinding at Mandarin always begins as near this date as possible.

The boys were watching from the ballroom windows (the Council Chamber being once more in use) for the first black puffs from the tall chimneys. The echoes from the plantation bell (rung daily at a certain hour the year round on all plantations) were still stirring the air. "Here she comes!" shouted Raoul, dancing about in high excitement. "Look, Don! *Now* you're going to see old Mandarin Plantation get busy!"

"I thought Mandarin was pretty busy yesterday," said Don, "but, *gee!* it looks now

like that part in the Sleeping Beauty where everybody comes to life on a sudden, don't it?"

High-wheeled wagons were lumbering out of the wagon yard, the drivers shouting to their teams and cracking their long whips; negro men and women in gangs were passing along the lanes laughing and singing in the early dawn light, each carrying a knife with glittering, hooked blade; an ant-like procession of laborers went ceaselessly between the towering mountain of coal and the engine sheds, wheeling barrows of fuel; the manager shouted and gesticulated orders from the sugar-house door; the whir of machinery made a murmurous undertone to the throb of the engines. The Great Event of the year had begun.

"It beats everything," said Don. "I want to be right out in the middle of it! When are we going to begin seeing it all?"

"Oh, pretty soon," said Raoul, rather indifferent, Don thought. "School comes first, you know." Raoul's tone was goody-goody, but he winked behind Don's back at Basile and Rick as they went down to breakfast; Basile and Rick winked back knowingly.

"Yes," admitted Don soberly, "I 'm sure none of us will ever want to throw over school again. I don't. But, my, it seems like a year until Saturday!"

Again there was a wink, unseen by Don, which passed from Raoul to Basile, then on to Rick and Zette, and even to Odille, whose round cheeks wrinkled comically in the attempt to imitate the others.

The Great Idea — for there was a great idea — was Zette's; she had been shaping it out ever since the day, two and a half months earlier, when she had learned the date of Don Carlos's birthday. "The twenty-seventh of October," Don had replied, "and I 'll be fourteen. I 'm to have long trousers when I 'm fifteen."

"That 's a long time to wait," said Raoul. "So am I when I 'm fifteen; but I come in February."

"I don't mind it so much now," said Don, "because I don't have any more holes in my stockings." He smiled gratefully across the table at Mrs. Allison. "Say, Zette, do you remember that King-Party at Madame Bonnard's, and the awful hole in my stocking?"

"Next Tuesday is your birthday, Don," Zette remarked on the way to school the day grinding began at Mandarin.

"Yes," said Don. "I 'll be fourteen."

"Do they keep your birthday at Happy Thought?" Zette pursued.

"Why, no, I don't think they ever did. I don't s'pose papa remembered it, and Black Mammy would n't know how, you know. Maybe my mother, if she had lived, she — might have — "

"Yes, she would," said Zette gently.

The next Tuesday there was considerable nudging and giggling among the gypsies — all but Don — as they started in a body to the breakfast-room. Mr. and Mrs. Allison were already seated at the table; Uncle Sallum drew back Don's chair with a flourish; and when Don, much taken aback, sat down, the old butler *handed him the mail-bag and the key*. Don gasped. Only on rare occasions was the honor of opening the mail-bag passed on from the Heads of the House to another of the family. Don had seen it fall once to Raoul when his medals for arithmetic and good conduct had come up from New Orleans, and once to Rick,

when he appeared at table the first time after his long illness.

"It 's — it 's a mistake," he whispered to Uncle Sallum.

"It 's all right, Don. Open away," Mr. Allison said.

"You 're allowed because it 's your Birthday!" shouted the others in chorus.

Don's hand trembled so he could hardly turn the key. He took out, first, several letters for Mr. Allison, reading their addresses aloud; then a note for Mrs. Allison; then more letters for Richard Allison, Esquire; for the Manager; for the Chemist; for Maum Angélique from her granddaughter in town; finally came one for Master Carlos Peyton, addressed in his father's handwriting; another for Master Carlos Peyton; and yet a third in a little blue envelope, the address straggling cornerwise across it; a fourth with a foreign stamp; another, big and scrawly, — all for Master Carlos Peyton. Some of these letters bore uncanceled stamps (having come enclosed and having been in Zette's possession for weeks).

"That 's all," sighed Don, almost limp with excitement, handing bag and key to Uncle

Sallum. Then, amid a tense silence, the boy tore open his letters, one after another. "From my father — with Black Mammy's cross-mark at the bottom," he announced; "from Mr. Lawrence Vaughn; from Laure Bonnard; from Jim Winston, he 's my chum at Rugby school; *from Floris Le Breton, Paris, France!* I never heard of such a thing! *Paris*, France! Birthday letters, even *papa's!* And I got 'em out myself! I never heard of such a — "

He choked; the tears gushed from his eyes and ran streaming down his face. "You-all can laugh all you want to," he sobbed, "I don't care. It 's just because I 'm so gl-l-*ad.*"

"There 's lots more things comin'," began Odille, "there 's — " but she was promptly suppressed.

Breakfast over, Mr. Allison arose in his place. "I must hurry back to the sugarhouse," he said, "but before I go, ladies and gentlemen, I have the honor to announce that to-day, the twenty-seventh of October, being the birthday of Don Carlos Peyton, a holiday is declared."

Everybody — except Don — knew what was coming, but they all thrilled just the same; it had seemed, somehow, too good to be true!

They joined hands and danced around the Heads of the House, after a long-established custom of their own, chanting: —

Thank YOU, Mis-ter All-i-SON.
Merci, Mad-AME All-i-SON.
Papa Dearie, Mamma Chérie,
Ring, ding, dong,
DO!

Mrs. Allison drew Don to her as the others trooped out, and kissed him. "That is for your mother, dear," she whispered.

"Oh Tante Louise!" he cried, throwing his arms about her neck. "You just know *every*-thing!

"You see, Don," explained Raoul, as they set out in charge of a sedate, elderly housemaid, "Zette thought it all out, about the letters and — and other things. Then father said it would be jolly to keep back your seeing the grinding until your birthday. So now, here goes for everything."

The crisp air was filled with the smell of boiling sugar. "It 's a wonder everything don't 'candy,' like Black Mammy's pre-serves," said Don.

They hailed an empty cane wagon, enor-

mous, with lofty wheels, which was clattering back to the field for a load. Blue-Gum Mose, the driver, who managed his four sugar mules with a single line, stopped good-naturedly and waited for them to climb in; they proceeded, bumping and jouncing, to Pine Sweep Cut.

The sugar-plantation is intersected by ditches which cross each other at right angles, dividing the fields into great squares; these squares are called "cuts;" they get their name usually from some landmark or tradition.

A hundred or more men and women were at work at Pine Sweep Cut, shucking and topping the cane with the dull edge of their long, broad knives, then cutting the stalks with a keen, quick downward stroke of the sharp edge, which felled them into serried rows across the furrows, where they glistened, red, yellow, and purple, in the hot sun. The cutters advanced like an army, each gang in charge of a leader; they were singing the "rolling" songs with their odd refrain: —

De rollers is hongry. Cut down de cane!
Zoo-da-loo!
De bilers is waitin'. Cut down de cane!
Zoo-da-loo!

Don, fascinated, could have followed at their heels all day; but his hosts hurried him back along the dusty road to the sugarhouse.

"Here's the Carrier," explained Raoul.

They had stopped under the vast sugar shed where the cane was unloaded from the wagons. The Carrier looked like a moving stairway with boxed edges; it traveled endlessly upward to the giant rollers, or crushers, on the second floor of the sugarhouse, carrying the cane flung into it armful after armful, from the mountain of shining stalks, by negroes who, like the cutters, sang at their work.

The crushers were spitting out green rivers of cane-juice, which frothed and foamed as it raced on to the tanks. Don followed the process from tank to vacuum pan, and on through mixer and centrifugal, until it dropped out of the shafts far below, moist, clean, tempting, pale yellow sugar.

"Hello!" he cried, "that's funny!"

He was watching a barrel which received and self-packed the sugar. It stood on a platform under the mouth of a shaft, bobbing from side to side as if with pure pleasure.

"It *is* funny," said Raoul. "We call 'em Dancing Barrels."

"I don't wonder they dance," Don said. "It's the jolliest thing I ever saw — the way the cane-juice turns out to be sugar."

When they came back to the Great House, after a long, happy, wonder-filled day, Don stopped on the gallery and turned to look out over the fields. The sun was low in the west, the level rays spreading goldenly over the cane, the "choo-*hoo!* choo-*hoo!*" of the factory beat the air, the voices of homeward-returning hands arose in long-drawn hymn tunes. "Well," he said regretfully, "the Birthday is over. Wish it was just beginnin'!"

But it was not over. A round table was laid in the dining-room, with silver, cut-glass, and flowers, just as if set for grown folks. Zette, in a fresh white dress (and the pink sash!), presided; Don Carlos sat at her right hand. Solomon waited, wearing his most company manner. A cake, set with fourteen lighted candles, came in with the presents; these included a seal ring from Don's father, a clasp knife from Raoul, a leather belt from the twins, a cravat pin from Odille, and lastly, a gold (paper) heart — one of his finest efforts — from Rick.

"If I was a sugar barrel," cried Don, "I'd dance. Hey, *what?*" For Uncle Sallum was bending to his ear.

"When young gentlemen has a birthday dinner," repeated Uncle Sallum, in a low voice, "they has to make a speech."

"Oh," said Don, dismayed. The spunk all oozed out of him; he stood up shaking before the familiar faces lifted to his. But he plunged in manfully: "I've had a fine birthday, ladies and gentlemen. Hm. Hm. The finest birthday that ever was. Nobody ever had such a fine birthday before." He paused, half minded to make a bolt for the door and end it — how else *could* he end it? But Uncle Sallum was smiling and nodding approval. "The finest birthday that ever was. And I — I thank you, ladies and gentlemen, for my Birthday." He sat down abruptly.

"You must all say, 'Hear! Hear!'" suggested Raoul in the second of stiff silence which followed.

"We say *present* in our class," said Odille.

"Hear! Hear!" shouted Raoul, Zette, Basile, and Rick. Odille shouted "Present!"

"You did it splendid, Don!" said Raoul heartily.

Don sprang again to his feet. "Shucks!" he laughed, "I can't make a *speech*. But I just want to say that I 'm the luckiest boy that ever lived. You-all come up to Happy Thought next year at cotton-pickin' time! Then I can *show* you how I feel. If it had n't been for you at that Bean-party, Zette, I 'd never have had you-all, or anything. I owe it all to Zette," he sparkled down at her.

"You owe it to Teddy Magoon!" Zette sparkled back at him, proud and happy.

XIV

THE MOON OF GOLDEN GLOBES

THE tent had been taken down and folded away; the Gypsies had vanished; and Robin Hood and his Merry Men now roamed the Good Greenwood — that is to say, the pecan and orange groves — after school hours, gathering nuts and smearing their gallant faces with the rich juice of oranges.

Bold Robin (Rick) with a quiver of home-made arrows at his back and a bow in his hand, pranced gayly about, shooting, with little effect, at what he called *mavis-an'-merle*, but which common folks knew as bluebirds. The grinding went on day and night; Mandarin was very gay. Hardly a week passed without a sugarhouse party coming up from the city for the week-end; at such times the Council Chamber had to be handed over for a ballroom.

One day — Basile was putting up the November sign, Rick having only that morning settled upon it — Mrs. Allison came in. She had

a letter in her hand and looked pleasantly excited.

"You need n't say a word, mamma," said Friar Tuck, otherwise Zette. "It 's another house-party, and you want the Council Chamber!"

"Just for a little dance," Mrs. Allison replied in a tone of apology. "She likes it so much better up here, where the floors are bare and —"

"Who likes it?" inquired Little John (Basile), looking down from the stepladder. "Some stuck-up girl," he continued, answering his own question. "Always wantin' somepn, girls are. I don't mean you, Zette, nor Odille, nor Laure Bonnard." He blushed, and hammered very hard on a tack; then he began to pull out the tack.

"You need not take down the sign," said Mrs. Allison. "It is very pretty and appropriate: 'The Moon of Golden Globes.' We will put a wreath of vines around it. But you must gather up your trash and put it out of the way."

"*Trash!*" said Rick, indignantly, when she had gone. "*Trash!*"

"I suppose it looks that way to them," Don

explained, swooping down on the gypsy kettle, a couple of circus-hoops, and some Natchez Indian buffalo-hide (brown-paper) shields, and bearing them away.

"Anyhow," said Rick, "we've got business in the Good Greenwood to-day. We've got to see about our mandarins."

The gatherers had been busy for days in the orange groves. The firm yellow spheres, shining like so many lamps amid the dark-green foliage of the trees, were fast disappearing into the packing barrels, ready for shipment; the ground below the trees was strewn with the overripe or less perfect fruit.

The more experienced pickers were setting in, to-day, upon the mandarin trees, those jimp, trim little cone-like play-toy shrubs, hung with play-toy oranges. The Mandarin children were specially interested in this crop; for the harvest of one row of trees — there were six trees, one for each boy or girl — had been formally made over to them by Mr. Allison. They stood about, watching with grave interest the growing pyramids heaped upon clean sheets spread under each tree.

"I'd like to sell mine on the spot," said

Rick unexpectedly; he used a phrase which he had heard from older lips.

"Why, Rick!" said Raoul, "you know our crop always goes in with Uncle Richard's. And when they are sold we get the money — for Christmas money."

"I know," said Rick, "but this year I 'd like to sell on the spot. I want the money now."

"What for?" they all demanded in a breath.

"I have reasons," Rick returned mysteriously.

Basile went over to the Great House with Cubit to carry a basket of mandarins for the table. He told his mother of Rick's unheard-of proposition. "An' he won't tell what he wants with the money," he said, much aggrieved.

"He ought to be brought up before the Council," smiled Mrs. Allison.

"*Rick!* Why mother, we can't bring *Rick* up. He's the Chief."

"Oh," said Mrs. Allison, abashed.

An hour or two later, Robin Hood and his Merry Men were seated on the sun-warmed grass watching the stripping of their own last tree — it chanced to be the one belonging to Robin himself.

"I vish to puy some oranches. Does anybody vant to sell oranches?" The voice came from above their heads. They scrambled up. A tall man, — a German apparently, — very seedy in dress, and wearing an odd peaked straw hat, had approached unheard and stood in their midst. He had long, light, drooping moustaches, and a very long and large nose, with a red bulb on the end. At a little distance a woman had halted. She wore a brown veil tied over a sunbonnet which almost hid her face, except for a pair of spectacled eyes which peered out queerly. Her blue calico skirt barely reached to her ankles; she wore men's shoes and a pink josey.

The Outlaws eyed the newcomers doubtfully. "I vill to puy oranches," the man repeated, jumping about as if set on springs. "I coom mit my — moder-in-law." He nodded his nose in the direction of the old woman. "Ve vish to puy. You haf some oranches to sell?"

"I have got some oranges to sell," began Rick slowly, "but —"

"Goot, goot," interrupted the stranger. "Vich is your pile? I puy dem on der shpot."

"This is my pile, right here," said Rick,

eagerly. "I have to have cash — money, you know."

"Fery well, my leedle mans. I pay you cash — moneys. I take all in der pile. I gif you ten — twelve dollar."

Raoul nudged Don. "Gee!" he whispered. "He must be from some place where oranges don't grow."

"I don't want to sell 'em all," said Rick hastily, "I want to deserve a boxful."

"Reserve," breathed Don.

"Reserve," said Rick. "I want to reserve some."

"Mine leedle frien', I vill not preak der lot. I gif you twelve dollar for der pile."

"No." Rick thrust his hands in his trousers pockets and looked as much like a trader as possible. "I reserve a boxful."

"Fery well," said the long-nosed Dutchman. "I vill shpeake mit my moder-in-law apout it."

He tripped off to where that lady stood and held a whispered conversation with her. He came back holding out a ten-dollar bill, which Rick took with a businesslike air, and put in his blouse pocket.

"I coom mit mine cart, pye an' pye. Goot mornin's, young shentlemans, an' young vomans." He took off his queer hat and bowed low. As he rose, something fell to the ground. "Why," cried Rick, running forward, "you've dropped your —" He stopped and gazed in blank astonishment at the nose which he had picked up. "Oh-h-*h!*" he yelled, "I know you! I know you, now. It's a fake nose. You're Cousin Larry, that's who."

He lunged joyously upon the young man, who, thus entrapped, was fain to take off his yellow moustaches and his bushy eyebrows.

"Yes," laughed Mr. Vaughn, set upon by the whole band of Outlaws. "I'm Cousin Larry. But don't pull me to pieces."

"Look! your mother-in-law is running away," cried Zette. The old lady had gathered up her skirts and was scurrying down the orange-aisles toward the house.

"Catch her!" shouted Mr. Vaughn. "She's valuable. Don't let her get away!" He joined, laughing, in the pursuit; but it was the fleet-footed Raoul who seized the flying figure by the bonnet string. The bonnet came off in his hand.

Floris!

"Don't break the spectacles," said Floris, smothered in a tangle of embracing arms. "They 're Maum's."

"When did you come?"

"Who came with you?"

"Is Grand'mère with you?"

"When did you come back from Paris, France?"

"One at a time, if you please," said Floris, "we — I got to Mandarin about an hour ago."

"You know, Rick," said Mr. Vaughn, "I wanted so to see you that I just had to come."

"You waited a long time," said Rick; "but," he added quickly, "I 'm mighty glad to see you."

"Grandmamma stopped in town to fix up the house for — for Christmas. A pretty big house-party came up with me to see the grinding. *And I've got things in my trunk*," concluded Floris, impressively.

"What I 'd like to know," said Zette, as they walked back to the house, "is where you and Cousin Larry got the rigs you 've got on."

"Oh," said Rick, stopping short. He fumbled in his blouse and took out the ten-dollar

bill. "Of course you was just jokin' about the mandarins, Cousin Larry," — he sighed a little, — "here 's your money back."

"Indeed I was n't joking," Mr. Vaughn assured him; "that bargain is sound as a dollar. I have particular use for that many mandarins, and I heard you were willing to sell yours on the spot. So, Miss Le Breton and I concluded to have a little fun while I was getting my oranges."

"*Mother-in-law!*" shouted Basile. "Did you know he called you his mother-in-law, Floris?"

"No," said Floris severely. "I did not. It was very rude of him."

"Oh," said Mr. Vaughn, with a penitent face.

"What are you going to do with the boxful you kept, Rick," asked Don.

"They 're for Marie l'Ombre," said Rick.

The house-party and the inrush of guests from neighboring plantations who came to call and to stay to dinner, kept Mrs. Allison and her assistants busy. But she stopped long enough to listen to Rick's request, "I want my pony,

an' Poke, an' the gray horse, for a while, mamma. Can I have 'em? Can I go for — for a ride?"

"Why yes, Rick. But tell Poke to be very careful of you. And don't stay out long."

"Yes 'm, I will. No 'm, I won't," he replied, to the two admonitions.

He rode off down the lane, attended by Poke on the gray horse. They came galloping back in the heel of the afternoon. Rick never said where he had been.

"Dat Sugar-man looks like he been sayin' his pra'rs," observed Blue-Gum Mose as the boy passed the mule-yard.

"Yassum," said Poke the next day, cornered by his mistress. "Li'l' Marse Rick ain't tole me not to *tell*. We did n't go nowher's *much;* des down to dat po' white trash lady's house, dat lives in de ben' o' the bayou yander. No 'm, I d'know what li'l' Marse Sugar-man *say* to dat po' white trash lady. He done went inside de house, an' I sot an' hol' de hosses. But I done seen dat li'l' po' white trash lame boy what can't walk, an' what was needin' of sompn dey calls a rollum-cheer. Yassum, I seen him thoo de winder; he des bus' out cryin' when li'l'

Marse Rick said sompn to him; I'd know what de Sugar-man *say*. But I hearn the po' white trash lady say she gwine ter pray on her knees fer li'l' Sugar-man long 's Gawd gin her de strenk to pray. She say she gwine ter git dat rollum-cheer fer her boy wi' dat money. Den li'l' Marse Rick come out an' say, 'We gwine ter go home now, Poke.' An' we come bilin' home. An' dat 's all I knows, Mis' Louise. Yassum."

XV

THE MOON OF YULE

WHEN the last jet-black whirl of smoke leaped from the chimneys of the sugarhouse, with a sort of vanishing "Ch-o-o-*h-o-o!* Ch-o-o-*h-o-o!*" it seemed as if silence in bodily shape had descended upon Mandarin Plantation. The ordinary noises of daily life did not count, — the cling-clang of the plantation bell, the champing of horses, the lowing of cattle, the barking of dogs, the *plunk-plunk* of banjos down at the Quarters, with accompaniment of *juba-pat* and chorus. You caught yourself leaning forward, listening for the throb of engines, the whirr of band and wheel, the clatter of cane-wagons, the cries of teamsters, the shouts of overseer and laborer. "It 's awful," sighed Don. "I feel like somebody was dead!"

The final Rolling Song, "De Rollin', de Rollin' is all done," poured from hundreds of throats upon the crisp afternoon air the twenty-

third of December; this, with the stopping of the engines, marked the end of grinding. There would be some weeks of activity still about the sugarhouse; but the crop was "made," and ready for shipment. Mr. Allison, worn but content, left his lair in the sugarhouse, where for three months he had snatched nightly a few hours' sleep, and moved back to the Great House.

Here double preparations were afoot — for the Plantation Christmas and for the short journey to the city, where the family always gathered for the holidays.

Mrs. Allison, standing beside the long table in the dining-room, assorted and labeled the ever-growing pile of packages and bundles handed up to her from the floor by Raoul and Basile.

"We have our own tree at grandmamma's in town, to-morrow night," explained Zette to Don. "This tree is for the Mandarin picaninnies." The two were at work over a wide-branched holly tree, set in its enormous tub, in the bow window.

"The picaninnies are our enemies," whispered Robin Hood to Maid Marian (Odille).

"They 're Saxums. An' they 're rugheaded kerns."

"My gracious," said Maid Marian placidly, munching popcorn.

"We have it for them every year, the morning before Christmas," continued Zette, "early."

Early! Don Carlos thought it could be hardly midnight when he found himself stumbling down the stairs with Raoul and Basile, buttoning his jacket as he went.

Mr. and Mrs. Allison had already lighted the candles on the tree; the former opened wide the door; and the rush of a hundred feet down the hall without was like the whirr of a great covey of partridges. The little negroes stopped just within the door, awed into silence by the glittering pyramid, towering to the ceiling, which met their eyes; then a gasp of rapture swept the dusky uplifted faces, the woolly heads bobbed, white teeth shone, yellow palms clapped, joyous tongues clattered.

"This is the jolliest *ever!*" proclaimed Don, high up in the tree, clipping off dolls, and boats, and driving-reins, and caps, and jackets, and tossing them down to Zette, with ropes of popcorn and strings of tinsel and bags of candy.

"We'll have a tree in Happy Thought dining-room one of these Christmases. See if we don't!" returned Zette. (And they did!)

Outside, during the distribution of presents from the holly tree, there had been a continuous murmur like the muffled breath of a slowly rising wind. Now, as the laden picaninnies marched forth, headed by Little Calline, with Cubit and Poke at either hand, the murmur broke into a mighty shout: "Chris'-mas gif', Marse Richard! Chris'mas gif', Mis' Louise!"

The grown-up Mandarin negroes were gathered, according to a befo'-the-war custom, on the front lawn, every soul of them, men and women, gay in their best clothes. The most of them had been long in the service of the Allisons; many were born on the place.

The merry-hearted shouting went on as the "white folks" appeared: "Chris'mas gif', li'l' Miss Zette!" "Mornin', Marse Raoul, Chris'-mas gif'!" and so on down the scale to Rick and Odille.

The big baskets piled with bundles were brought out; and in the dewy dawn of Chris'-mas Eve morning, the master and mistress of

Mandarin gave out the presents, selected with care and thought; each man or woman stepped forward as his or her name was called, and backed away, ducking bare heads and grinning delight. Not one of all the three hundred and more souls employed on the place was forgotten.

At the conclusion of the largess, an improvised song and chorus, led by Blue-Gum Mose, shook the air.

"Chris'mas comes but once a year," bellowed Mose, throwing back his head and opening his mouth until the whole of his blue gums showed.

"Manda*reen!* Manda*reen!*" roared all the others.

Mose: "But when it comes, we gits ou' sheer."

Chorus: "Manda*reen!* Manda*reen!*"

Blue-Gum Mose held up a hushing hand while he stooped to Rick, who stood at his knee, and swept him to his shoulder; then, dancing about, graceful, light as a feather on his bare feet, the giant opened his mouth again: —

Mose: "Black folks, white folks, who 's yo' marster?"

"Sugar-man! Sugar-man!" sang the plantation.

Mose: "Who fetch good luck to de cane an' de paster?"

Chorus: "Sugar-man! Sugar-man!"

And with the Sugar-man beckoning them on from Mose's shoulder, the great crowd moved, singing and dancing, across the lawn, around by the Cherokee-rose-hedged lane to the Quarter, where the Rolling Breakfast awaited them.

"How they all love Rick!" wondered Don.

"Everybody does," returned Zette proudly; "Rick is the favorite; there never was anybody like our Rick!"

"It's funny," said Basile, strolling around the Council Chamber in the Le Breton mansion, after the homecoming greetings were over, "everything is littler than it was!"

"It's always that way when we first get back to New Orleans from Mandarin," said Raoul. "Old Mandarin is the *bulliest* place! But old Royal Street is bully too. Who do you think I saw first pop? Betsée du Pain! Have

some plarines." He tendered all around the remains of the sugary confection.

"An' Pietro was right on our corner," Basile broke in, "grindin' away; an' Francesca —" he stopped to hide a blush behind a bit of praline.

"R-a-o-*u-l!* D-o-n! B-a-*sie!*" Rick's voice came up, thin and shrill, from the courtyard.

"Hul*o!*" shouted Raoul over the gallery railing.

"Come down *he-r-e!*" They hurried down to the twilight-filled court. Rick had dragged the steed, Bucephalus, from his dusky nook in Odd Corner and was standing over him a-straddle, hatchet in hand.

Bucephalus dated from the year before, when Rick and his companions were Greek warriors; his body was composed of a stout round billet of wood; his head, legs, and tail were made of pieces of board and lath. His single ferocious eye and the zebra-like stripes on his back and tail were done in black ink. He was very wobbly on his legs, but his head was upreared proudly.

"Hurry up an' help me," said Rick, — "there's not a minute to lose." This was a

RICK MARCHED AHEAD WITH A STAFF

favorite phrase of Mr. Allison. "I 'm goin' to sacerfice Bucepherluss's tail an' legs an' head."

"What for?" demanded the newcomers.

"For a Yule-log; Bucepherluss's body will be the Yule-log. We 've never had one at Christmas. I think we ought to have one, 'specially as they had 'em in Robin Hood an' his Merry Men's time."

And thus the deed was done.

The Eve of Christmas was soft and warm; stars shone in a velvet-black sky; the windows of the great salon were set wide, so that the merry voices and the cheery laughter from the street came in; myriads of roses filled the old-fashioned vases and banked the broad mantels. But the open fireplace, with its tall brass fire-dogs, held the glowing embers of a slow fire. The Bringing in of the Yule Log was a great success. It — the log — was borne in on the shoulders of Raoul and Don (the zebra stripes of the one-time steed shining in the light); Rick marched ahead with a (broom-handle) staff; Zette, Basile, and Odille came after, carrying baskets of sacred wood, — the head, legs, and tail of Bucephalus. They all sang, each in his own key, what Rick called

a "ballard." The log was put in place and the sacred wood thrust under it. But Bucephalus refused to burn; he smouldered sullenly on the coals, — body, head, tail, and legs. "Never mind, Rick dear," whispered Floris, "we'll put him by until next Christmas. They always did that, you know."

The Christmas Tree is not among Creole traditions; it had come into the family Le Breton — with Mr. Allison — from the American Quarter. But it had taken firm root. On this particular night there was a tremendous gathering of kinspeople in the old Royal Street house. The tree was a very gorgeous one, loaded with such fruit as grows only on Christmas Trees. A Le Breton granduncle, rotund and jolly, handed out the gifts. There were no novel features; things went pretty much as they always do at a Christmas Tree party. Only, when the last tissue-wrapped parcel had been taken down, and the candles still blazed and smoked, and a pandemonium of drums and whistles and squeaking toys had begun to fill the salon, the rotund granduncle called out in a loud voice, "Mr. Lawrence Vaughn."

Mr. Vaughn stepped forward, and before

any one could guess what had been taken from the tree for him, the uncle Le Breton was laying in Mr. Vaughn's hand the slim white hand of Mademoiselle Floris Le Breton. A great clapping of hands followed; and aunts and cousins and uncles of every degree began to press forward, and all talk together.

Presently everybody was dancing a *farandole*, Cousin Larry and Floris leading the long gay twisting line in and out of the rooms, halls, and galleries.

"Whatever is it all about?" asked Rick, dancing along with all his might. His partner, a jolly, fat great-aunt, said, "Why, don't you know! Floris and Larry are engaged."

"That means to-be-married, don't it?"

"Yes, it does."

"H'm, h'm," said Rick, doubtfully.

The old Cathedral St. Louis stands in the very heart of the French Quarter. It is built upon the spot marked out for the first church by Bienville, when Louisiana was a wilderness; and the village of Balbanca sprawled over the place where New Orleans now lies. Here the wedding took place, on New Year's

eve, one week after the Christmas Tree. Rick, walking before the bride in a page's costume, and carrying her bouquet, decided, as they passed up the stately aisle, that from the next morning he would be the Sieur de Bienville, and lead the Gentlemen of France to adventures. Zette and Odille were among the bridesmaids; Raoul and Basile were ushers. Some of the wedding guests in the church laughed a little and whispered to each other that it was just like Floris Le Breton to have all those funny Le Breton-Allison children in her wedding procession; "for goodness knows what they might take it in their heads to do!" But they all loved her for it, too!

A wedding reception followed at the house, at which the American and the French Quarters "assisted," as the Creoles say. Mr. and Mrs. Vaughn stood under a wedding-bell of white roses; the bride, who wore orange-blossoms in her hair, from Mandarin, was very beautiful.

"It 's been like a year out of a dream," Don Carlos said, half to himself, later in the evening, standing by Zette in a corner. "It 's been grand. I just wonder sometimes if I 'm awake!"

"Well, I am," said Zette. "Let 's go and get some ice-cream."

Cousin Larry and Rick were in the dining-room. Rick was having cake and ice-cream. "Floris is awful pretty," Rick said with his mouth full.

"I think so myself," Mr. Vaughn admitted.

"You 're married to her, ain't you?" said Rick.

"Why, yes," said the bridegroom.

"She 's your truly wife, now, Floris is?"

"Yes, *indeed*."

"Then you 're my truly, really cousin." Rick put out a sticky hand which Cousin Larry shook, and kept in his while he stooped to the little boy's ear to say: —

"I 'll tell you a secret, Cousin Richard. I 've loved Mrs. — ah — Vaughn for a very long time; ever since I was as big as you, I reckon. But she only began to love me one year ago to-day — "

"At the Place of Talkin'," cried Rick. "Balbanca, you know. An' they 're talkin', talkin', talkin', just like then. But I don't mind it now."

"Well," Cousin Larry went on, "that day

a certain little boy was running away from the Moons of Balbanca, and he tumbled down the stair. He was a very inky tousled little boy —"

"I had on my Sunday suit," protested Rick.

"Well, a certain chap picked that inky little boy up in his arms and carried him into the Queen's bower. And that, Cousin Richard, was the very minute that the Queen, my — ahem — my wife, Floris, you know, began to love me."

"No!" cried Rick, delighted.

"Give you my word of honor," said Mr. Vaughn. "You may ask her."

On the strength of this wonderful revelation, Rick took another plate of ice-cream.

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